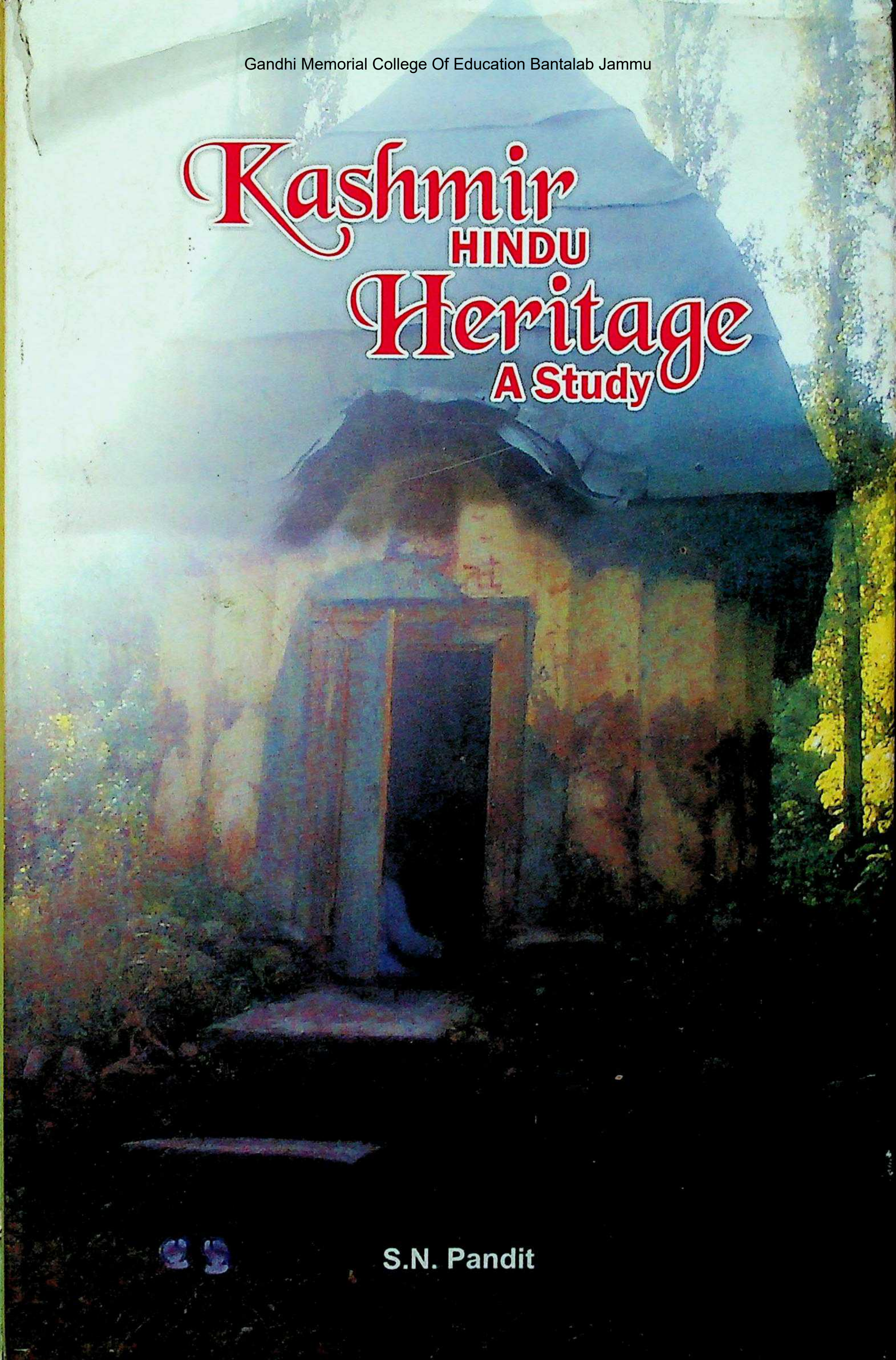

Kashmir HINDU Heritage
A Study

S.N. Pandit

The present work is an attempt to reconstruct the idea of glorious heritage and traditions so dear to the Hindus of the valley and up held by them since the dawn of civilization. It can not be denied that the topics covering various aspects of heritage of a particular class of people, is very vast but a systematic analysis of a few among such topics, is not less in weight. It provides a close historical and cultural study of all the variegated aspects that come under the purview of heritage of the people of a particular area. While discussing the topics, need-based scriptural evidences, as far as possible, have been given where-ever necessary. In addition to the socio-religious aspects, the book presents a modern and scientific analysis and approach in understanding our colourful heritage.

The dilapidated condition of the family-deity temple of the author at Tral-i-Bala, the Tehsil headquarters of his residence in the valley.

The afflicted condition of the parental house of the author at Tral-i-Bala.

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HINDU
HERITAGE
A Study

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S.N. Pandit

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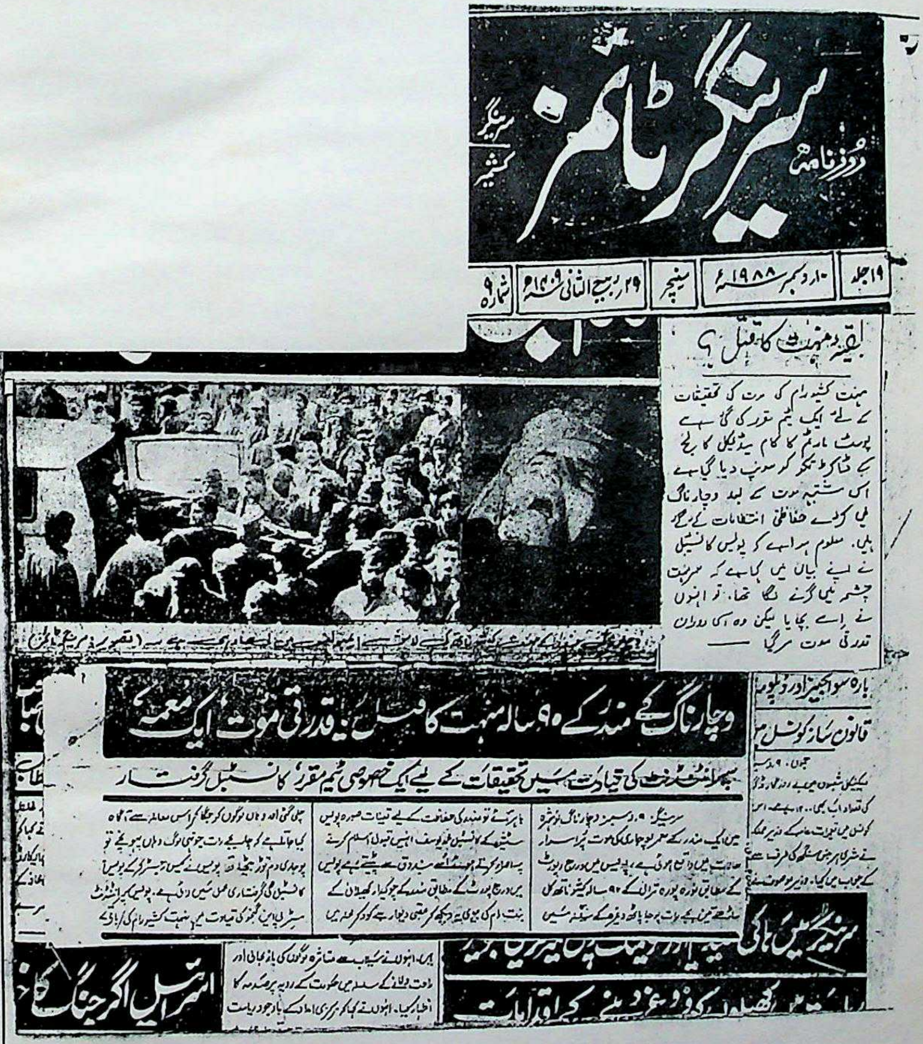
Most reverently dedicated to my beloved father Shri Keshav Nath Pandit, who was the first victim of Kashmir militancy on December 8, 1988, at Vicharnag, Srinagar.



روزنامہ سرینگر ٹائمز
سرینگر کشمیر

جلد ۱۹ | ۱۰ دسمبر ۱۹۸۸ء | سنیچر | ۲۹ ربیع الثانی ۱۴۰۹ھ | شمارہ ۹

بقیہ: مہنت کا قتل؟

مہنت کشیو رام کی موت کی تحقیقات کے لئے ایک ٹیم مقرر کی گئی ہے پوسٹ مارٹم کا کام میڈیکل کالج کے ڈاکٹروں کو سونپ دیا گیا ہے اس مشتبہ موت کے بعد وچارناگ میں کڑے حفاظتی انتظامات کئے گئے ہیں۔ معلوم ہوا ہے کہ پولیس کانسٹیبل نے اپنے بیان میں کہا ہے کہ مہنت چشمہ میں گرنے لگا تھا۔ تو انہوں نے اسے بچایا لیکن وہ اسی دوران قدرتی موت مر گیا

وچارناگ کے مندر کے ۹۰ سالہ مہنت کا قتل یا قدرتی موت ایک معمہ

پوسٹ مارٹم کی تیاری میں تحقیقات کے لیے ایک خصوصی ٹیم مقرر، کانسٹیبل گرفتار

Press coverage of the funeral procession
dated December 9, 1988.
By the Daily Srinagar Times
Srinagar

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

An attempt has been made to reconstruct and streamline on the basis of our *Puranas* and other historical evidences some of the basic points that touch the hypothesis of our heritage related matters. In the present age of assimilation and dissimilation, it is feared that not only the few points that have been touched in the present treaties, all such symbols that touch the religious nerve of all my brethren either in the form literature, monumental grandeur or the other replicas of minor importance so dear to every Kashmiri Pandit, are apt to get washed away from the mindset of our younger generations, if not recorded earnestly. We feel ourselves in the desert of hot sand like wilderness when we ponder over the cause that a society that lived so harmoniously millennium after millennium under the sway of various isms that we now name as *Jainism, Buddhism*, *Tantricism, Shaivism, Vaishnavaism* and other major/minor sects whose names have been washed away by the all prevailing 'Time', turned contrast and conflicting within a short span of a few centuries, a fact that is un-known to the age old Indian civilization.. Anyway, one should always remember that a wise man never rests at ease under the protection of a wild bear. The Truth is that prevails once again and always.

It has been my good fortune that late Prof. (Dr.) B.L. Koul, D. Lit., Ex. Head of the Post-graduate Department of Sanskrit and Hindi, Kashmir University, Srinagar, who impressed upon me to take up such a venture, selected this topic of research for me to explore it. However, the great scholar did not live long to have a glimpse of the final shape and form. Let peace be upon the noble soul!. I feel pleasure in confessing my deep gratitude to Prof. (Dr.) Ved Kumari Ghai, Ex. Head of the Post-graduate Department of Sanskrit, Jammu University, who always shaped and painted my scanty thoughts and gave them a shape and voice with her Motherly treatment.

I sincerely express my gratitude to the help extended to me by Prof. B. L. Fotedar, in spite of his busy schedules. This monumental work would have been incomplete without his valuable guidance and timely suggestions that he open-heartedly extended to me not from time to time but every time. I fell a sense of gratitude and respect, for the sympathy, timely encouragement and suggestions extended to me by Prof. Dr. M.K. Teng, Formerly, Head of the Departmen of Political Science, University of Kashmir, in processing and compiling this project. He also so kindly wrote a foreword to this project. I should feel indebted to the Principal and the librarian of Shri Ranbir Kendriya Sanskrit Vidyalaya and the librarian of Shri Ranbir Research Library, Ragunath Mandir, Jammu, respectively who helped me in my ventures. I must also extend my well wishes to Mr. Dalip Pandita and Mrs Manjoo Pandita, my son and daughter-in-law, both of whom laboured much in arranging and decorating the matter with illustrations where-ever necessary. I should also extend my thanks to Kanwal Krishen Pandita, my elder son who used his personal contacts in mobilizing and making available the research materials that I needed from time to time during the compilation of his work.

I feel confident to record that this book, "Kashmir Hindu Heritage" – A Study, shall be of immense importance in understanding our history, religion, civilizational and other socio-political affairs of the microscopic minority community of the State. In fact there is a great need for such explorations in the fields that have been included in the present study so as to remove the curtains of doubt and disbelief from the minds of those who, under the present conflicting scenario, are counseled to believe that advent of civilization started just at the close of the first millennium.. Lastly it is confessed that the author has chosen some of the topics in this project randomly but one thing is sure that this will open a window to the scholars and students of this particularly learned and educated class of the society who are deeply rooted with the history and heritage of this land, to select new topics of their choice on this analogy in their future works. Suggestions, if any, for the improvement and approval of such ventures shall always be a boon to the well wishers of this tradition.

S.N. Pandit.

Deepawali, 2012.

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FOREWORD

The architecture of the Hindu ritual tradition of Kashmir is Sanskrit in essence and form. Hindu Kashmir evolved as a part of the Sanskrit civilization of India. The Sanskrit civilization of India grew from its Vedic beginnings, across millennia, through the era of the Upnishadas and the Brahmanas and the period of the Puranas, spreading out into geographical frontiers, beyond the borders of India, The Sanskrit religious culture assumed an uninterrupted continuity in its evolution from its early Vedic origins to the more elaborate ritual structures represented by the Vedic Kalpa Sutras and the Vedic Griha Sutras. Growing across a continent, the Sanskrit ritual culture followed a process of integration to absorb the local traditions and even the ritual variants of the other ethnic and cultural components of the Sanskrit civilization of India.

Kashmir, which formed the northern salient of the proto-Aryan India, was geographically placed in the close vicinity of the Harrapan, the Sindh Valley and the Sarasvati cultures, which formed a part of a single cultural continuum. The proto-Aryan India formed the broad base on which the Sanskrit civilization of India evolved. Archeological evidence has come to surface, which suggests that the Harrapan people, the people who lived along the banks of the river Sarasvati and the people who lived in Kashmir, where of the proto-Aryan ethnic stock and inhabited the north of India from pre-historic times.

Geological evidence has been found, which has established beyond doubt that the river Sarasvati flowed down from the Himalayas in a north-westerly direction into the Rann of Kutch, before it dried up gradually, during the period from 1800 to 1000 B.C. due to tectonic movements, which caused changes in the course of its tributary, the River Satluj. Evidence is available to prove that metal tools were inducted into the later stone-age culture of the proto-Aryan people, who lived in Burzhama in Kashmir, from the advanced chalcolithic cultures of the Harappan and the Sarasvati people. In fact, it can be safely concluded that the induction of the metal tools into Kashmir led to the commencement of the Nilamata era of the history of Kashmir, sometime before the Mahabharata war.

Ritual culture of the Hindus in India has a civilizational sanctity. It has a sociology of belief systems, and a history which cannot be changed. All judgments about ritual structures are preferential and, therefore, bound by the limitations of the relativity of values. Not surprisingly, therefore, the Sanskrit ritual culture has provided the Hindu community of Kashmir stability in times of stress, to which it has been subjected for centuries.

The study undertaken by Soom Nath Pandit into the ritual culture of the Hindus of Kashmir is a pioneering effort. He has a commendable record of scholarship in the academies of history and culture of Kashmir. His earlier study on the ritual culture of the Hindus of Kashmir, "Kashmir Hindu Sanskars", published in the year 2006, has been a path breaking effort in this direction.

Pandita's attempt to present an elaborate description of the rituals, the Hindus of Kashmir observe, opens up fresh methodological perspectives for the study of the history and culture of Kashmir. He has deliberately, maintained an independence of outlook, which has enabled him to uncover vital historical and cultural facts and data about the evolution of the Hindu ritual culture of Kashmir from its early Vedic proto-Aryan roots. To that extent his study is expected to form a part of the basic source material for the reconstruction of the history of Kashmir.

Pandita's study reveals the Vedic sub-stratum of the ritual culture of the Hindus of Kashmir which goes to establish beyond doubt, the close identity between the ritual forms, mentioned in the Vedic Kalpa Sutras and the Griha Sutras and the ritual forms observed by the Hindus of Kashmir. Further, the study provides an insight into the incredibly long process of integration of the Pauranic ritual forms as well as the ritual practices, the Dharam Shastras, more specifically, the Dharam Sutras prescribed. Laugaksha Karma Kanda is a later codification of the rituals observed by the Hindus of Kashmir, a task which was undertaken centuries after the composition of the Dharma Sutras.

A strikingly original aspect of Pandita's, study is the elaborate account of the festivals and fairs he has attempted to give, which brings to surface their Vedic and Pauranic content. Another original aspect of his study is the description of the oral traditions; the Hindus of Kashmir still follow with devotion and reverence. The empirical data and facts, Pandita has been able to uncover by his enquiry into the festivals and oral traditions of Kashmir, provide glimpse of the intellectual climate and spiritual experience of the early Sanskrit people of India.

A more significant aspect of the study, Pandita has undertaken, is the elaborate description of the Pooja Padati – the forms of worship, he has attempted to present. The description is specifically data-based and reveals the details about deities worshipped, the intricate procedures in the offering of worship, and the scriptures especially recited in strict observance of the Sanskars, the Dharam Shastras prescribe.

The belief systems, the Hindus of Kashmir have adhered to, their spiritual experience and their commitment to their ritual forms, are an expression of the fundamental unity that has pervaded the Sanskrit civilization of India. All frames of reference, within which research and investigation into the Sanskrit religious and ritual culture is undertaken, must be derived from their roots in the history of Sanskrit India. Pandita's study is an attempt in that direction.

Dated:-
Vinayak Chaturthi, 2012.

Dr. M.K. Teng,
(M.A., Ph.D., D.P.A.)
Professor,
Formerly, Head of the Department.
of Political Science,
University of Kashmir.

PREFACE

The main objective of this study is to assess the socio-cultural history and heritage of the Kashmiri *Pandits* from times immemorial to the present day. During the pre-historic period, the changing seasons, the Sun and the Moon, the stars, the night and the day, a good crop and its failure, the rains, the thunder, the gushing water of the rivers and rivulets, all filled the human heart with awe and reverence for almost all aspects of Nature. His behaviour towards all these powerful aspects of nature gave rise to different beliefs and superstitions. With the passage of time such venerations gave place to religious practices like *Pooja*, *Dana, Japa, Homa, Yatra,Vritas, Utsavas* and so on. The Vedic form of worship gave rise to *Pooja* and continuation of this worship amongst the aboriginals was the cause to make it a little transmute. Thus the early tribes among them gave the concept of a number of gods and goddesses that in time took the form of *Deva/Devi* worship recorded in the *Pauranic* lore. This sort of worship involved the imaginary presence of the worshipped god/goddess that was treated like a real guest and the steps of his worship included: *Aavahanam, Asanam, Poojanam, Padhyam, Argyam, Tilkam, Pushparchanam,, Japam, Tapam, Danam, Vastram, Naivedam, Dhakshina, Apooshanam* and *Visarjanam* as its main features. Our *Vedas, Upanishadas,* the *Ramayana,* the *Mahabharata* and most of the later *Puranas,* are a testimony to what has been stated above.

The practice of Vedic sacrifices seems to have been discouraged by the composers of the *Puranas*. The same fact is explained by the *Nilamata Purana*, the first written document containing the instructions of *Nila* for the people of the valley of Kashmir. It has clearly put aside along with a few other old practices and substituted by *Japa, Tapa, Dana Snana, Dharshana* while discouraging all earlier practices. There is no denying the fact that animal sacrifices have been advocated by the *Purana* at a few places in case of worshipping the *Pishacha* Chief *Nikumbha*, or the famous revolutionary Pauranic Rishi, *Parusharama* and some of the *Raudra* incarnations of the

Goddess or *Raudra*. A similar mention is made about *Vajapeya, Rajasooya* and *Pundareeka* sacrifices etc., and such sacrifices have been classified under the *Kotihoma* and *Lakshihoma* validities. Though the mention of such sacrifices does not occur in the Vedas but the *Purasnas*, like the *Matsya Purana*, the *Vishnudharmottara Purana* and the *Brihatsamhita* clearly advocate the performance of such sacrifices. The *Narsimha Purana* also lays down the procedure to be followed while performing such sacrifices.

The *Vritas* and *Utsavas* have also been classified keeping in view the society based needs. Some of these are purely associated with agriculture. The deities are invoked at the time of sowing the seed and are offered thanks at the successful and good harvesting. The celebrations on such occasions represent the *Agrayana* sacrifices described in the *Shrautasutras* and modified from time to time. It is for this very reason that our peasant presents the first handful of reaped corn/crop to the deity. Such celebrations include an outing on a picnic or sight seeing and visiting parks and gardens as we do on the New Year's Day also. Some of these festivities include the veneration of our *Go-dhana, Pashu-dhana, Gaja-dhana* (our cattle wealth), *Vastu (*dwelling) *Pooja,* and things necessary for the well being and prosperity of the society as a whole.

The other *Vritas* and *Utsavas* are observed on a holy *Tithi* or to please a deity on such specific days. Here we see that the Vedic ritualistic cult worshipping incarnations or anthropomorphic form of a deity in the shape of *Vratas, Poojana, Japa* etc, much later than the Nature worship that prevailed in the beginning. There is no denying the fact that the change was gradual. The impact of the *Upanishadic* philosophy had long ago begun to change the religious outlook of the people throughout the Indian sub-continent. Buddhism, Jainism and a number of other popular faiths, lured the common masses as a substitute for ritualism that promised attainment of same merits and awards as could be obtained from the highly and costly *Shrauta* sacrifices. Thus, the earlier sacrificial cult that the masses followed was losing popularity gradually before the arguments of its own

Upanishadic, the Buddhist and the Jain canons. Under these circumstances, the only means by which Brahmanism could attract masses to their cult was to create some cheaper and less violent methods and conceptions of propitiating their gods and getting the rewards of pilgrimage to holy places for the devotee. The *Nilamata Purana* came forward to help the local *Kashmiraians* to meet their spiritual aspirations as did a number of other *Maha Puranas* to the masses of the whole sub-continent. Besides lessening the importance of the *Kotihomas* and *Lakshahomas,* it propagated the pilgrimages to a number of holy places, taking of baths at a number of *Tirthas* so as to lessen the burden of evil. It advocated the worship of images of the local gods and deities, recitation of god's names and abstinence from taking food during such prayer times, etc. These activities that form the basis of the religious practices of the Kashmiri *Pandits* even today were advocated by the *Nilamata Purana*. One thing needs to be kept in mind that all such age old practices were in conformity with the patterns that were prevalent in the rest of the Indian sub-continent.

The geographical features of Kashmir do not have a very direct influence on the heritage, rituals and customs of those people who came to this land and lastly merged with the original dwellers in complete harmony in the valley surrounded by lofty mountains. The importance of the mountains as its great protecting walls has at all times been duly recognized by the inhabitants and the foreign observers. *Kalhana Pandit* says that the valley of Kashmir is unconquerable by the foreign foe owing to the protection provided to it by the mountain walls. The natural barriers of the valley have not only guarded it from the foreign invasions but have also stopped the alien influences to completely alter the civilizational, cultural, historical and social structures of this piece of land. It is because of this very fact that we see some slight differences in the socio-religious, ritualistic patterns and customs of the people of Kashmir and that of the *Bharatavarsha* when we make a comparative study.

It may be added that Kashmir was completely a Hindu State till the medieval times and the Hindu kings patronized the study of Sanskrit, the first known and written language of the Sub-continent. Thus the local scholars were well versed in the *Dharma Shastras, Smriti* literature, the Indian poetics and other branches of learning. Kashmir *Shaiva Darshan* also known as *Pratibhigya Darshan* or the *Trika* philosophy flourished here. *Charak,* the famous scholar of *Ayurveda* was a resident of Kashmir. The field of Indian poetics appears incomplete without the introduction of *Kavya Prakash* of *Mammata.* The inclusion of other treaties on *Alankara Shastra* and other related genres, profusely discussed by the *Kashmirian* scholars, is an asset to the Sanskrit literature as a whole. Sanskrit drama would have been incomplete without the treatise like *Abhinava Bharati* on the *Bharat Muni's Natya Shastra* and a stream of scholars who were masters in their respective fields of knowledge, flourished in Kashmir. These included *Acharya Abhinava Gupta, Kshemendra, Bhatta Lolluta, Bhatta Kallata, Kalahana, Bilhana, Shambhu, Mankha, Ratnakar, Johnaraja , Shrivar* and others.

A major portion of literature created in Kashmir in ancient times is untraceable now. Out of thirty eight works of *Acharya Kshemendra* there are only eighteen available now. In the available works of *Kshemendra* and *Mankha* there is a mention of a number of poets and scholars and the fields of their scholarship but nothing has survived due to the apathy of the foreign invaders and their utter disregard for the ancient heritage and language of the valley. Besides, a considerable number of manuscripts, the hard toil of our ancient scholars, are piled up in different research libraries of the world and we have not as yet been able to reclaim them. The scholars of the *Sharada* script and Sanskrit language, who could help publishing agencies in the publication of this material, are fast disappearing and the day is not very far when this precious treasure will be treated as a huge heap of garbage by the new generations of the land to which it now belongs.

It is most unfortunate that the present scholars are indifferent to this huge treasure of literature that is still buried deep in the stores of Research/Libraries of the country and abroad. All of us well understand that our heritage, history, rites, rituals and customs that were so dear to us and to our forefathers till yester years, form a major part of this valuable treasure. Love for the modern philosophy of progress, prosperity and change is good but this does not mean severing our connections with the past. Our history and heritage enlighten our path towards modernity and once the roots of history and heritage are ignored, we become a rudderless boat.

It was with this intention that I made the first attempt to write about the *Sanskars* that our community has preserved to date. The present attempt is of a variegated nature and includes a short sketch of the three Upa-*Puranas* particularly connected with Kashmir, a concise history of some of the famous *Shakti Peethas* of the valley has been dealt with in detail in the next chapter, lest these should disappear either from our memory or from the cultural map of the valley due to the deliberate attempts being made to change place names. The fourth chapter on fairs and festivals has been discussed against their historical and cultural background where-ever available so as to remind our youth of our colourful past. A detailed sketch has been given about some of the renowned personalities considered to be the path breakers in our society, both in the past and present and this forms the fifth chapter of this book. Lastly a short description of our religious practices, has been given so that our youngsters may continue to practice *Asanas, Sandhya* and the *Snanvidhi,* etc. In fact it provides a glimpse of the way of daily living patterns of our ancestors that enabled them to stand up as a proud people after every onslaught on them. It also provides a glimpse of our duty towards our gods, manes and *Rishis.* At the end of the present study a detailed Index of some important place names, etc., has been added to make the task of the readers easier in locating the places and areas mentioned here and there. Suggestions, if any, for the improvement and approval shall always be a boon to the present study.

Shivaratri:,2013 **S.N. Pandit**

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Chapter 1

The Puranas – Our Heritage

'*Purana*' means something old, ancient, legendry, a mythological account of pre-historic past that has very little or negligible historical evidence. Even then it comprises a major part of the Sanskrit literature. We can safely say that this literature contains all that which formed all our legends till the art of writing emerged. In this way *Puranas* are very closely related to the past history of mankind of this region of the globe. Besides, political history, the *Puranas* contain historical development of a particular area or state, the art and philosophy of the region in general and the living conditions of the people in particular. It is not easy to affirm if there was only a single *Purana* in the beginning or there existed several such *Puranas* simultaneously? Generally various texts confirm that there existed two categories of *Puranas*, the *Mahapurana* and the *Upapuranas* both eighteen in numbers. Actually the number of *Upapuranas* is said to be much more than eighteen as is generally accepted. It cannot be denied that there have certain improvements been made from time to time in this treasure of literature that describes the human development since times immemorial, to reflect the change in times. Besides, it served as the main reason of conservation of all our Sanskrit literature that has reached to us till date. The five qualities like, (1) progeny, *(Sarga)*, (2) continuity, (*Pratisarga*), (3) lineage, (*Vamsha/Vamshavali*), (4) the age of the particular Manu, (*Manvantara*) (5) and the genealogical tree/sketch, (*Vamshanucharita*) are considered as the basics of a *Mahapurana.*[1]. Besides, the said five essential elements, our *Puraanas* generally contain description about our *Varnashram Dharma*, our *Sanskars*, our feasts, festivals, modes of worship, charity, *Shraaddhas*, pilgrimages and their usefulness as well.

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[1] *Sargascha pratisargascha vamsho samvatsarani cha* I
Vamshaanucharitam chaiva Puraanam pancha lakshanam II,
Markandeva Purana, 134 –13.

Some of the *Puranas* don't even touch the basic five elements but still have been categorised as the *Puranas* like the *Bhagwat Purana* that does not contain all the five or ten basic elements that qualify a *Purana.*

Generally, the *Upa-Puranas* depict the personality and the deeds of a particular god or confirm the socio-religious tendencies of a particular sect of people living in a particular part of the country, state or locality. That is why; the importance of such written materials is increasingly considered as more important to understand the ancient socio-economic and historical perspective of multi cultural groups that existed in India. Kashmir has not lagged behind in presenting this type of pre-historic treasure to the world of literature and we have the following three literary master pieces that come under the latter category of our *Puranas*:-

The *Vishnudharmottara Purana*,
The *Nilamata Purana*, and
The *Vasuki Purana*.

1. *The Vishnudharmottara Purana,*

It is the most voluminous of all the three *Puranas* found till date in Kashmir and various *Vaishnavite* dictions found in the ancient *Madra Desha* (the area between the North Punjab to the south of Jammu province) have elaborately been discussed in it. This can be categorised as the earliest encyclopedia of this particular area as well. Great scholars of Sanskrit language and literature with a sound knowledge of our historical legacies, like R.C. Hazara, Winternitz, and Dr. Ved Kumari Ghai are of the opinion that this encyclopedia covers the northern hilly area of the Indian sub-continent falling to the south of the Kashmir province. Their assessment is based on the following facts:

i. The Author of the treatise is well versed with the geography of the land discussed by him in this *Purana*. He has made a vivid description of the rivers like, the *Devika, Sindhu, Vitasta, Chandrabhaga, Irawati, Vipasha* and *Shatadru* that flow through this vast track of land since times immemorial and make this land more prosperous than other parts of the sub-continent. He has given a special reference of the *Devika, Chandrabhaga* and *Vitasta* out of all the rivers and rivulets flowing through this area. According to this *Purana*, the *Vitasta* has descended direct from the heavens and the *Devika*, is the beloved of Lord Hara, and as such, the water of both these rivers is the destroyer of all our sins. The water of the *Chandrabhaga* is cold like the rays of the moon and it bestows life and happiness to the devotees. The writer adores the banks of the river *Devika* as the daughter of King *Himalaya* and the beloved of *Shiva*.[1] According to this *Purana, Uma* has come to this land in the form of *Devika* at the request of the *Brahmins* so as to grace the general public of this area. It is said that an area of 4

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[1] *Harasya dayitaa Bhaarya Shaila Raajasya sutaa varaa I*
Umaa Deviti Madreshu Devika ya Saridvaraa II
Naraanaam anukampaartha Brahmnairavataaritaa I
Triyorubhayustasyah kshetram krosha chatushtyam II
Vishnudharmottara Pu., 167, 15-16.

Kos (8, miles) on both the banks of this river is more sacred than the water of all other *Tirthas*. The water flowing through this area

is consecrated and more sacred than the water of all the holy *Tirthas*. The author is of the opinion that anybody who bathes in the waters of this river is sure to attain the position of a chief adorer of the gods and all the sins of his previous births shall vanish with the first bath taken at the *Narasimha Tirtha*, which is situated on the banks of this river within the said area.[1]

ii. While discussing the details regarding the rivers of this region, the author clearly makes us to understand that he is well versed with the topography of this land. The author has made a mention of thirty one rivers with their mounts in the *Purana*. [2] There is a reference regarding the confluence of a number of rivers. For instance, on the confluence of *Chandrabhaga,* a river that contains pure and cold water and *Taushi (Tawi*), river comprising fresh and warm water, clearly indicate that the author is a resident of this area. He also asserts that *Devika* has a lion as her ride like *Uma* and *Chandrabhaga* is sitting on a peacock. He advocates the worship of Mountain Lord (*Vishnu*) on the bank of the *Devika* River.

iii. The different varieties of the rice plants (*Shaali*) with an elaborate commentary on the rules and practices that are to be followed regarding its plantation have found more elucidated description in the *Purana* and it clearly confirms its place of origin in the plains of the sub-continent. A number of scholars who have studied the *Purana* more deeply and closely have also confirmed this observation.

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[1] *Vishnudharmottara Puarana, I, 215; 44-52.*

[2] *Na tad daanyam na tat sasyam na tat shaakam na tat phalam II.*
Na tat moolam na tat kandam na tat pushpam naraadhipa I
Naaga lokodbhavam yat cha Naagalokodbhavam cha yat II
Anupabandhanottham cha tat na yat naasti yadava I
Sadaa punyaphalam sarvamajasra amrita yogatah II
Ibid., *I,* 151, 38(b) – 40.

iv The *Purana* appears to have been compiled between the fourth and the fifth centuries A.D., as a number of Greek words like "*Hibuk*", "*Sunfa*" etc., have crept into the narration of the *Purana. Mulasthana (Multan*) has been depicted as the main center of Sun worship and that is a clear indication of the Iranian influence on the compilation of the said *Purana*. The author of the *Nilamata Purana*, it appears, has borrowed some sentence formations, though with some improvements, from this *Purana*. [1]

v. The stories of *Urvashi* and *Bharata,* contained in the *Purana,* appear to have directly been recorded in it under the influence of the great Sanskrit poet *Kalidasa* from his masterpieces of Sanskrit literature. From all this it is revealed that the *Purana* appears as a creation of the fourth-fifth century A.D. The composition of the *Purana* also confirms that it has been compiled some time near the era of the Golden Age of the Gupta period. The references to prove this in the narration are:

a. The journey by sea has not been depicted as a curse in the said narration,

b. It gives a very high place to the Cavalry Divisions of the army against the Infantry Divisions.

c. The art of painting and sculpture has been given a due place in the *Purana*.

d.Lord *Buddha* has not been counted as one among the ten incarnations of Lord *Vishnu* as we find in the *Nilamata Purana*. The *Purana* does not bear the conception of *Brahminic* version regarding the incarnation of the Buddha. On the other hand, it considers him as a preacher of Dharma in the *Kali* era for the annihilation of *Maleccha* kings and all those who oppose the *Vaishnava Dharma*. [2] It appears that with the passage of time, the impression of the people about the *Buddha* underwent a change and he was not treated as god but as a respectful preacher of *Shyakya* cult and '*Jagat Guru*' of the masses as quoted in the *Nilamata.*[1]

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[1] ……. …... *Toshi toshita Bhaaskaraa* I
(*Nilamata Purana*, v.120. (a)
… *Toshi tatra Arkanandini* II (Vishnudharmottar Pu. ,I.162,35 (b).

[2] *Mayaa Buddhena vaktavya Dharmah Kali yuge punah* I
Hantavyah Mleccha raajaanah tatha Vishnu vashaatmanaa II
Vishnudharmottar Pu., III, 351; 54

e. The narration includes a reference about the *Yavanas* and the *Shakas* but there is no mention of the Huns in the *Purana.*

All these factors are a clear indication to place the compilation of the *Vishnadharmottara Purana* in the category of Sanskrit literature compiled prior to the advent of the sixth century A. D. We can safely say that this treatise of high literary and historical value and an encyclopedia of the southern regions of our state has been compiled in between 400 to 550 A.D and definitely prior to the compilation of the *Nilamata Purana.*

The *Vishnudharmottara Purana* is subdivided into three parts. The first part has 269 sections. The second part has 183 sections and the last one has 355 sections. The *Purana* starts with the request of *Vajra,* the grand son of *Shri Krishna*, to the *Rishis* of the *Ashram* to explain the doctrines of *Vaishnava Dharma* and the head of the *Rishis, Markandeya* agrees to relate the same to him. From the second to the eleventh sections, the *Purana* contains a vivid description of the origin of this universe, incarnation of *Varaha Avatar* as the saviour of this planet, description of different *Lokas,(Bhoo, Bhawah, Swah*;) the *Yama/Shiva/ Brahma/* and *Vishnu Lokas),* islands and different sects of people inhabiting them.[2] From the twelfth to the seventy-first sections of this part, there exists a descriptive assessment of the famous cities of *Kaushal* and *Ayodhya.* Besides the *Rama Katha*, it includes many other stories of *Shaivite* and *Vaishnavite* order.

The story of *Indradyumana,* a *Pandya* king devoted to *Hari,* who, in his previous birth, was an elephant, named Haahaa , was caught by Huhu, a crocodile, while drinking water in a pond. Distressed Haahaa begged Vishnu to save him from the misfortune and Huhu was killed by Vishnu with his disk. The story is originally contained in the *Bhagwat Purana*, and is repeated in this *Purana* as well. Both of them were basically two *Gandarvas* (singers), who were reborn as an elephant and a crocodile named, *Haahaa* and *Huhu* respectively.[1] It also includes the famous *Shankara Gita*, which *Mahesha* recited in praise of *Vishnu* and who also reciprocated and named him (*Shankara*) as *Parama Brahma* (the Ultimate Reality).

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[1] Ch. *Roopakaamo yajeth Buddham shatru ghaate Kalikanam.* I
Vishnudharmottar Pu., III, 48; 22 with
Vishnu Devo Jagannaatho Brahmana praaphte Kalau yuge I
Ashtah vimshattame bhaave Buddhau naama Jagadguruh II
Nilamata Purana, v. 709

[2] *Varaaham Kandamaale cha Kashmireshu cha Chakrinam* I
Vishnudharmottar Pu., III, 125, 10

The *Purana,* while discussing some important religious festivals, earmarks a few such occasions for ladies only like the festival of *Chandodeva* and it is said that by worshipping him, women get worthy sons. [2] The portions from the first section, part 72 – 106 include the division of time, the dates and horal calculations, etc. The remaining part contains a description of the genealogy of *Dhruva*, son of the famous legendry king *Uttanapada* who was devoted to Lord *Vishnu.* Then follow the stories relating to *Prathu*, *Puroorava* and *Urvashi*, the heavenly nymphs. It also includes the sad story of petrification of *Sagara'*s one hundred sons and the descent of the *Charana Ganga* from the heavens at the request of *Bhagiratha*, for the liberation of his one hundred ancestors. Besides, this portion includes legendry tales of *Madhu, Kaitabha, Dhundamara, Daksha*,(the famous demon kings), and Shiva, *Bharata* and the devotional songs, as *Hansa Gita*, and '*Satutis'* of *Ganesha, Narasimha*, and *Kartikeya*, etc.

The duties of a king have mostly been discussed in the second part of the *Purana.* In the first section of this part *Vajra* asks *Markandeya Rishi* about the duties of a king and the *Rishi* narrates him all that was revealed to Lord *Ram* by *Varuna* who in turn had heard all that from *Pushkara.* The importance of the king and his qualities, election of a king, the vows to which a king should adhere to, choosing the auspicious year of coronation and the requirements of an army like the horses, armory and men, etc., have been dealt with in detail in the seven sections of this part. It is the duty of people of a republic to elect a king" [1]. The distressed position of a kingless state has been discussed in the *Purana* as follows. 'There can neither be *Kanyadana* (marriage rites of a girl) in a kingless state nor do its people deserve prosperity. Everyone will take law into his own hands and as a result there can be no law and order in such a land. Both, the earthly and the heavenly people will be at a loss in such a state. It is after acquiring countless virtues by the subjects that a king like *Parthiva Ram* is born who is faithfully adored by all the four *Varnas* of the society.' [2]

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[1] . *Vishnudharmottar Pu,* I., 193.

[2] *Poojanaa Chandodevasya tanayam gunavarjitam I*
Na praaphnoti tathaaphnotim gunavantamasamshayam II
Ibid. II 35 16.

The *Purana* states that the state governed by an able and religious minded king always attains prosperity and gets good governance. So the elders who have a hand in the state administration should thoroughly examine and choose such a king who is faithful to the religion, truthful and devoted to the people and the state. [3]

While discussing the qualities of a good king, the author confirms that: 'the king must possess all the essential qualities necessary for the supreme authority of the state. He should be polite, quick in action, religious minded, soft tempered, chaste, virtuous, high thinking, courageous and a person who speaks with an open heart. He should belong to a high family so that the people trust him. He should always take the middle path in the execution of his verdict of law for punishing the defaulters. He should know about every nook and corner of the state through his spies. He should consider his son and the enemy at par while imparting justice. He should have a good training in driving a *Ratha* (cart) and he should be an adept horse and elephant rider. He must possess a good knowledge of archery. He should adore religious fasting and should take part in meditation and *Yajnya.* Some of the sacrifices as advocated in the *Purana* appear to have been introduced for the first time as no such mention occurs either in the *Vedas* or in any of the earlier treatises of this nature. It also advocates that all the three *Varnas* are entitled to hold such *Yajnyas* and obtain blessings.[1] The king should be a lover of learning and a beloved of his teachers. He should always remain in the company of well educated and experienced people and should work according to the advice of his courtiers and ministers. The *Purana* clearly establishes the relations between the king, the *Purohita*, the *Samvatsara* (astrologer) and the Ministers. It is stated that the king should appoint the *Parohits* and the Ministers with the consent of the astrologer. The *Purana* has established the superiority of the *Samvatsara* over all other cadres. It says that the king should put aside the decisions put forth by the *Parohita* or the Ministers in case it goes against the wishes of the *Samvatsara* although the *Parohita* is also like a mother and a father to the king, [2] He should not show his back in the battlefield. Acting in accordance with the prevailing conditions, obedience, power of recognition, submission to the worthy, punishment to the wicked; are the six qualities, which according to the *Purana*, a king should acquire. He should also ensure the total enforcement of a particular law that he enforces in the state he rules.'[1]

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[1] *Raashtrasya krityam dharmajya raajya evaabhishechanam* , I
Vishnudharmottar Pu.,.II., .3

[2] *Araajakeshu raashtreshu naiva kanya pradeeyati I*
Vidhyate mamtaa naiva tathaa vitteshu kasyachit II
Swaatmyo nyayah pravarteta vishvalopastathaivacha I
Nrilokasuralokau cha syataam samshayitaavubhau II
Mahadapih punyasambhaaraih paarthivo Raama jaayate . I
Yasaikasya jagat sarvam vachane Raama tishthati II
.Ibid., II. 2. 6

[3] *Chaturvarnyam swadharmastham teshu desheshu jaayate I*
Yeshu desheshu rajendra raajaa bhawati dhaarmikah II
Tasmath sarva prayatnena raashtramukhairnareshwarah I
Pareekshya poorvaih karteyyu dhaarmikah satyesanggrah II
Ibid., II,2.6.

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[1] *Kotihomam swayam yastu kuryat Braahmana sattamah I*
Kshetriyo vaathava Vaishyastasye punya phalam mahat II
Vishnudharmottara Pu, I 165, 52- 53.

[2] *Vritam grihitva raajyarthi vrinuyat Braahmanottamam I*
Saamvatsaram sukhaayasya sarvasya jagato nripah II
Tena adhishtau tu varayed Raaja Mantri Parohitau LL
Saamvatsara viruddhastu ayajoo Raaja Purohitah II
Purohito anyathaa Raajyo yathaa maataa pitaa I
Ibid.,II.,4; 27, 41 (b), 5; 54 (b), and 55 (a).

The king should know the activities that his subjects love most. He should also abstain from all those actions that his people do not find desirable. He should not take such decisions which create disturbance in the state. He should always oblige his people with his good deeds and actions.[2]

The duties of the king have been enumerated in these words. 'A king should guard the interests of his people as attentively as possible like a pregnant lady who puts aside all her other comforts as futile and pays her full attention to the caring of her pregnancy.'[3]

In view of the fact that the people of the country save their king when he is engulfed by misfortunes so it is the duty of a king that he, while following the doctrine of Dharma, saves all his subjects from every misfortune and comes to their rescue. He should save his people from the misdeeds of his treacherous administrators and cunning *Kayasthas* who pretend to be well-wishers of the king and the people but in reality wait for a chance to exploit both.

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[1] *Sarva lakshana lakshanyo vineetah priyadarshanah I*
Adirgasutri dharmatma jitakrodho jitendriyah II
Sthoola lakshyo mahotsaahah simitpurvaabhi bhaashikah I
Saroopah kulasampanah kshiprakari mahaabalah II
Brahamnyashchavisamvaadi dridabhakti priyamvadah I
Alolupah samyatvaag gambhirah priyadarshanah I I
Rathye gaje ashve dhanushi vyayame ch kritashramah I
Upavaasa tapah sheelo yajnya yatro Guru priyah II
Mantrisaamvatsaradhinah samaresho nivartakah I
Kaalayajyashcha kritayajyashcha nrivisheshajya eva cha II
Pujyma pujiyitaa nityam dandyam dandiyita tathaa I
Shadgunasya prokhta cha shaktyuchetah tathaiva cha II
Vishnudharmottara Pu, **II. 2; 1- 8**

[2] *Karmana kena me loke janah sarvo anurajyate I*
Virajyate tathaa kena vijyeyam tan maheekshitaa II.
Viraaga jananam sarvam varjineeyam prayatnatah I
Jana anuraaga prabhavo hi lakshyo rajyo yato Bhaargava II
Ibid., , II. 24. 71-72.

[3] *Nitya Raajaa tathaa bhaavyam garbhini sahadharminaa I*
Yathaa swa sukham utsrajya garbhasya sukham aavahet II
Gharbhini: tad vadiha bhaavyam Bhupatinaa sadaa I
Prajaa sukham te kartavyam sukham uddhishya chaatmanah II
Ibid., III. 61. 22- 23

The *Purana* further confirms that rights and the duties of both, people and the king, are reciprocal and should be considered complementary to one another. [1]

The 65th section of the *Purana* deals with the education, training and up-keep of the prince/s. This portion is replete with mythological stories so as to make the narration more educative and interesting for the royal progeny. Sections 145-150 describe the seven sections of the royal administration. In the sections from 151-158 the daily chores of a king have been discussed in detail. The description of conquests and the modes and strategies to be adopted in various battles on the war front, have been discussed in sections 175-176. Many secondary topics like the architectural designs, the art of archery, medicine, duties of women, etc., have been discussed in the *Purana* in detail after concluding the list of duties of a king.

At the beginning of the third canto *Vajra* asks *Markandeya Rishi* to elucidate the matters that enlighten the path of peace and prosperity for a devotee in this world and the world beyond. In reply, the *Rishi* advocates veneration of the *Devas* (gods) and observance of the fasts on pious and holy days (*Vritas*). He explains to *Vajra,* through discourses on art and sculpture, the art of making of idols of gods. He explains to him that the art of painting is not possible unless we know the art of music (singing) which also is dependent on the art of poetry and poetics (*Geet*). It is because of this combination that we call it '*San-geet*'. It comprises a number of *Chhandas, Alankars, Rasas* and *Ragas* prevalent in this land during the earliest times when Sanskrit, *Prakrita,* and *Apabramsha* flourished. The process continued even when other dialectformations were common among the people of the region during the time of their composition. The *Purana*, unlike many other *Puranas*, has discussed a number of musical instruments like *Tattam* (a stringed musical instrument), *Sushir* (wind instrument), *Ghanam* (bells), *Murja* (Harp - a special kind of *Veena)*, *Vamshi* (flute), and *Tala* (drum-like instrument).[1]

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[1] *Aapannam api dharmishtham prajaa rakshat yathaapadi I*
Tasmaath dharmakaamena prajaa rakshya mahikshita II
Subhgaishcha atha durvritta raaja vallabha taskaraih I
Bhakshyabhaanaah prajaarakshyah Kaayasthaicha visheshatah II
Vishnudharmottara Pu., II, 61, .26-29.

Sections 17-31 of this canto of the *Purana* contain a description of different kinds of allegories, like the characters, (heroes/heroines), the elements of *Rasa* and *Bhawah* in a composition. Sections 32 and 33 contain various actions with regard to a number of dance forms. Sections 35 to 43 deal with the art of painting. Sections 44 to 85 contain the art of sculpture and sections 86 to 95 contain the art of temple architecture. The *Purana* mentions the images made of stone, soil, gold silver, brass, wood, sand, copper, flour, straw and ghee. A detailed description of *Chaturmukhi Vishnu* with four faces and four arms is given in this part of the *Purana.* [2] This is followed by rules regarding the installation of an idol in a sanctum sanitarium. The portions from 126 to 225 of the *Purana* contain a descriptive discussion regarding a number of days of the year to be observed as the fasting days and the celebrations to be held in this region on those days. Sections 226 to 342 comprise the *Hansa Gita,* a considerable portion of this seems to have been extracted from the *Smritis*. It is followed by a vivid description of various schools of thought, *Varnashram Dharma*, description depicting the things worth eating, pure and impure things, penance, *Yajnya,* alms, duties and actions of a king, etc. The concluding sections contain the stories that confirm the supremacy of lord *Vishnu* above all gods and deities.

In this way the *Vishnudharmottara Purana* has attained a prominent position as an encyclopedia of a vast region of our country covering a major part of our glorious past. It, among other things, is a re-compilation of information contained in our *Upanishadas, Mahabharata, Natyashastra, Paraskara Grihasutra, Yajnyavalkya* and *Manu Smritsis*. Besides, discussing views on the emergence of this planet, it is a collection of thoughts of our seers and saints on geography, astronomy, and geology. It contains an estimation of our sacred days and the modes of our veneration unto our deities and gods, performance of *Shraaddhas*, our duties, our rights and politics, the virtues we adore and the sins we avoid, our longing for penance, our physique and its anatomy, medicines, treatment of ailments, animal husbandry, modes of medication, gynecological treatments, the art of cookery, floriculture, grammar, lexicography, poetic embellishments like *Chhanda, Alankara*, the musical instruments and their place in music, drama, *Geet* and acting as an art, sculpture, painting, architecture, etc., all have aptly been discussed in detail in the *Purana*.

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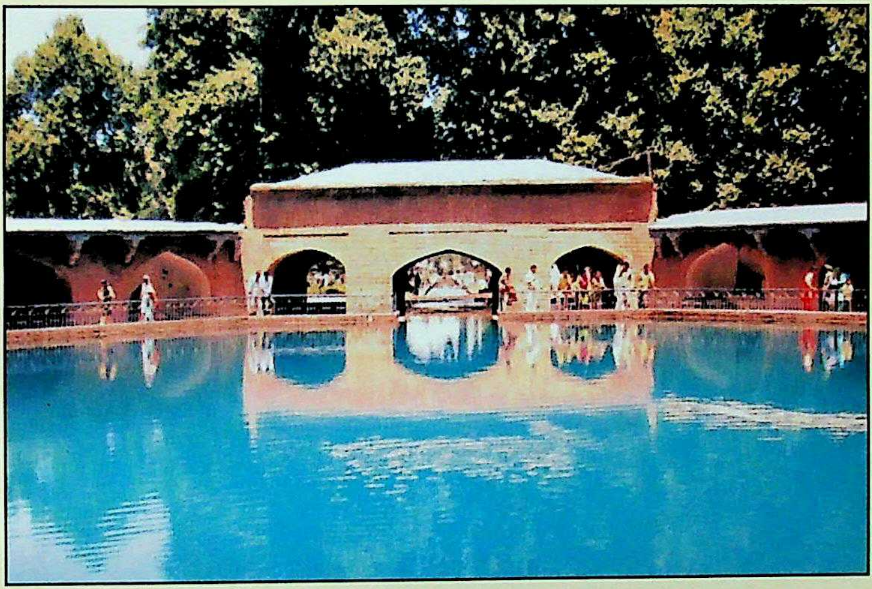
[1] *Chaturvishamaatodhyam tatam sushiram ghanamavanaddham cha II Tatam veenadi, sushiram vamshaadi, ghanam taalaadi, avanaddham Murjaadi .....II*

Vishnudharmottara Pu. III, 65, 19.

[2] *Vishnudharmottara Pu.* III., 85, 43-44.

The *Vishnudharmottara Purana* emerged as a treatise of eminent importance till the beginning of the seventh and eighth centuries A.D. While making a comparative study of the *Vishnudharmottara Purana* and *Matsya Purana*, Dr *Rajindrachandra Hazara* has authoritatively mentioned that a considerable portion of the latter *Purana* has been extracted from the former one. It is also worth mentioning that the two great Sanskrit scholars of our glorious past namely, *Bhamah* and *Dandi* have used a major portion of this *Purana* in their world famous creations. *Alberuni*, the famous Arab traveler of the eleventh century has quoted this *Purana* at a number of places in his travelogue. Extracts from this *Purana* have been quoted by a number of commentators of our *Smritis* like *Bhavadeva, Vijyaneshwara, Jeemutavahana, Hemadri, Madhavacharya* and others, while commenting on the *Smiritis* and other related literatures contributed by them to the treasure of Sanskrit literature. All these facts indicate and confirm the glory and grace of this encyclopedia that once was very popular in the southern part of greater Kashmir for a number of centuries. Besides, the *Purana* has an important place in the field of lexicography of the ancient Indian literature.



Nilanaga at Verinag, Kashmir

Nilamata Purana

In fact *Nilamata Purana* is a conversation between the king *Janmejaya*, son of *Parikshita*, and the grandson of *Arjuna*, the famous character of the great epic *Mahabharata* and *Rishi Vaishampayana*, a pupil of *Maharshi Vyasa*, the author of the *Mahabharata.* In the chronicler of the world famous treatise, *Rajatarangini, Kalahana Pandit* has given an account of some of the 'lost' kings of ancient Kashmir as mentioned in the *Nilamata Purana.* [1] Buhler is of the opinion that the name-places and the religious importance of such locations as contained in the *Nilamata,* are of immense importance in preserving their exact names than those contained in the chronicle of *Kalhana.* The *Nilamata* can safely be categorised as an *Upa-Purana*, which, besides discussing the ancient civilizations of the valley of Kashmir, is the main store house of considerable importance for the scholars and students of anthropological studies of this particular area.

From the perusal of the information contained in the *Purana*, it appears to be a composition dating between the sixth and the eighth century A.D. *Kalhana* has quoted this *Purana* as an early literary composition. [2] The *Krityakalpataru* includes a number of couplets said to have been included from some unknown *Brahmapurana*, that has remained untraceable till date but we find all these couplets in the *Nilamata Purana.* It is admitted that *Lakshmidhara*, the composer of the *Krityakalpataru,* has composed the treatise in between 1104 to 1143 A.D., as such, all these couplets had become a part of the said *Brahmapurana* much before *Lakhshmidhara*'s time and that all these couplets appear to have been included in the said

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[1] Kalhana Pandit, *Rajatarangini*, I , v . 14.

[2] *Kriyam Nilapuronokhtaam achindat naagamadvishah II*
Tasya pratyakshataam yato Nilastuhinaviplavam I
Nyavaarayat jagaadaapi swapuraanavidhim punah II
Ibid., I.,178(b), 183.

Brahmapurana from the *Nilamata Purana* because the latter *Purana* contains the words "*Desho ayam*"(in this land), which in the *Krityakalpataru* (extracts quoted from the *Brahmapurana*) have been marked as "*Sah Deshah*", (in that land). The festivals connected with the 1st Snowfall, are of a similar description in both the books, the *Nilamata Purana* and the *Krityakalpataru,* but the later has an addition of mentioning that the places where snow is not available, the manes can be venerated by simply uttering the word "*Hima*". This clearly shows that the original reference of the Snow- fall festival is contained in the *Nilamata Purana* and, while copying this portion from it, the author of the *Brahmapurana* has made an addition necessary for the aspiration of the local people.

There are certain instances and the usage of certain words that place the *Nilamata Purana* in the category of the earliest compositions. The following facts show that the *Purana* is comparably an earlier treatise:

1. The *Purana* contains the word "*Pradurbhava*"(to come into being) for the word "Incarnation".
2. The *Purana* is silent about the beginning of the "*Kalik*a" era.
3. It contains a descriptive list of the flowers and leaves used in venerating various deities and gods but it very scarcely mentions the use of Basil leaves (*Tulsi*) which is in contrast to other treatises of the Indian origin that pertain to the latter periods.
4. The *Purana* seldom mentions the name of *Radha* while naming *Krishna.*
5. A comparison of the manuscripts of this *Purana* available till date show that a revised edition of this *Purana* was composed some time in the ninth century which is a clear indication that the *Purana* must have existed and remained popular long before the ninth century A.D. when its revised edition came to be written.

Like all other *Puranas* this one too has the conversional style wherein a number of "*Mahatmyas*" are stitched together. In the beginning of the *Purana, Janmejaya*, the son of *Parikshita* (grand son of *Arjuna*), asks *Rishi Vaishampayana,* the disciple of

Vyasa why the king of Kashmir did not participate in the great war, *Mahabharata.* In reply *Vaishampayana* states that *Jarasandha*, a famous warrior and an associate of the *Kauravas* had invited *Gonanda*, the then ruler of Kashmir, to help him in his fight against the *Yadavas*. The king did extend his help to his relative *Jarasandh* but was killed in the battiefield while fighting with *Balarama,* the elder brother of *Krishna.* To avenge his father's death, his son, *Damodara* went to *Gandhara* to eliminate *Krishna* who had gone there to witness a marriage (*Swayamvara*) and he got killed there by him (*Krishna)*. After the death of *Damodara, Krishna,* considering the sanctity of the valley, came to Kashmir to install *Yashowati,* the pregnant queen of *Damodara*, on the throne of Kashmir. [1] *Vaishampayana* further states that *Gonand* II, the son of *Damodara* was an infant when the *Mahabharata* war was fought, so the then king of Kashmir could not participate in the great war *Mahabharata*. It is followed by the story of the *Satisara,* its drainage and the coming of different races into the valley after the dry land worth habitation emerged. This whole episode is explained by *Brihadashva* to *Gonanda* that on the final day of the destruction of this universe, *Sati*, the beloved of *Shiva*, took the form of a boat and *Manu* loaded it with all the seeds of creation and took it to *Naubandhana* peak of the mountains till the day of reemergence of the land that started during the present *Manvantara*. [2] The story of the demon, *Jalodbhava,* born from the waters of the *Satisara*, who after great penance, was bestowed with a boon of immortality by *Brahma* in the waters of the lake, follows. Thus having attained great power, he (*Jalodbhava)* started annihilating the creation of *Manu* in the vicinity of this area that included *Dharvabhisara*, *Gandhara*, *Jahundura, Shaka, Khasha, Tangana, Mandava* and *Madra*. The inhabitants of all these areas fled for the safety of their lives due to the terror of *Jalodbhava* and thus the demon dominated all this area without any restriction. One day *Maharshi Kashyapa* visited this area at the request of the *Naga* Chief, *Nila*. On seeing the miserable condition of this un-inhabited and baron area due to the menace of the demon, he approached gods (*Devas*) to demolish the demon as early as possible so that the ecology of the area could be restored. *Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesha* reached Kashmir in the accompaniment of other gods and goddesses. *Jalodbhava* took shelter in the waters of the *Satisara* because nobody could kill him in the waters as per the boon from *Brahma*. *Ananta*, on the orders from *Vishnu*, made drainage of water at the bottom of the lake with the help of his plough. In this way the water of the lake was drained out as contained in the *Purana*.. *Jalodbhava,* through his magical powers, engulfed the whole area under the cover of darkness. *Shiva*, taking the moon and the sun in both his hands, made this whole area resplendent. A furious battle took place between *Jalodbhava* and Lord *Vishnu* and the latter annihilated the demon with the help of his disk. Plain and dry land emerged after the drainage of water from the lake. *Kashyapa* wanted that the people who accompanied him and the *Nagas* may live collectively on this land. The *Nagas* objected to this suggestion. Annoyed, *Kashyapa* cursed them to live in the company of the *Pishachas*. It was after much repentance expressed by the *Nagas* and due to the intervention of *Nila* that *Kashyapa* amended the curse and ordered the *Nagas* to stay for a period of six months with the *Pishachas* and other six months in the company of men in rotation each year for four *Yugas* and at the end of that period they could live collectively with other races.[1] For a period of four *Yugas* the followers of *Kashyapa*, receded to the plains for six months of winter. At the expiry of the fourth Yuga, during one such move a feeble *Brahman*, *Chanderdeva,* could not move to the plains due to his old age. The approaching fear of the *Pishachas* and winter, compelled him to approach *Nila* for his safety, who granted him asylum and informed him that his other followers could live in the valley for the full year from thenceforth provided they accede to the special and prevalent modes of worship and abide by certain special tenets of Dharma and observe some of the fairs and festivals of this land as mutually agreed to by the Nagas and the *Pishachas* The tenets and the codes thus revealed to Nila by *Keshava*, were observed by all thence forth and it was mutually agreed that the people thus migrating, would not be compelled to leave this land during the winter season from that year on wards. [1] This portion of the *Purana* is an extended conversation between *Chanderdeva* and *Nila* wherein besides, the sixty-five rites, rituals and festivals; a number of religious places of the valley (*Tirthas*) and more than six hundred *Naga Devatas* have been described in detail. *Chandradeva* studied all these rituals and festivals during his stay in the palace of *Nila* during the winter season and related the story to *Virodhaya*, the king of the migrants, when he returned from the plains along with his subjects at the onset of the Spring season. The *Purana* confirms that the followers of *Kashyapa* started living in the valley permanently and constructed their houses and other dwellings after they observed all the festivals and rites as directed by *Nila*. [2]

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[1] *Antarvatneem tasya patneem Vaasadevo abhishechayat I*
Bhavishatputra raajyartham tasya devasya gauravaat II
Nilamata Purana, v., 9.

2 *Sati Devi swayam kaale tasmin nautvam karoti vai I*
Manurbhavishyamstasmiastu sarva beejaani maayayaa II
Ibid., v., 40.

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[1] *Na vayam maanushair sartham vasaamo Munipungavah I*
Taan uwacha tatah kruddah Kashyapu vai Prajaapatih II
Evanukhtah tada Nilah pitram praaha dharmikah I
Nityameva hi vaatsyamo maanushaih sahitaa vayam II
Na Pishachaishcha vatsyamo daarunair daarunapriyah I
Nilamata Purana vv. 207,219, and 220(a).

Like all the other *Puranas* there is a vivid geographical description of the high mountains, valleys, rivers and rivulets of the valley in the *Nilamata Purana,* not in the abstract form but as the representatives of our holy deities, gods and goddesses. The *Purana* includes the description of seven islands like, *Jambu, Shaka, Kusha, Kroncha, Shamalya, Gomeda* and *Pushkara* .[3] Out of all the seven islands, the *Jambu (Dvipa),* the isle of Jammu comprises: *Uttara Kuru, Ramya, Hairanvata, Bhadrashva, Ketumala, Ilavrita, Harivarsha, Kimpurusha* and *Bharata-varsha.*[1] Kashmir is situated in the northern part of the continent, *Bharatavarsha* where all the holy places (*Tirthas)* of the world exist. The *Purana* contains that every inch of this fertile land is prosperous and fortune bestowing. The pious land of Kashmir has been described beautifully in the beginning of the *Purana*: [2] It has a mention of almost all the holy places of the sub-continent. It has the sacred springs and lakes of the *Nagas*, the holy rivers and ponds, sacred temples and above all, renowned hermitages attached to them. Every water-let and river of this land is pious and attributed to one or the other *Naga* deity or goddess. Every mountain peak of this land has remained the playfield of one or the other god or deity. *Shiva, Hari (Vishnu*) and *Brahma* arrived to kill the demon *Jalodbhava* and made their abode on the *Naubandhana*, southern and the northern mountain peeks of the area surrounding the *Satisara* and are as such famous as *Maheshwara Shikhara, Hari Shikhara* and *Brahma- Shikhara*. At the request of *Kashyapa*, *Sati*, the spouse of *Shiva* took the form of river *Vitasta* and it is flowing through the valley since then for the benefit of the people of this land. Expressing her inability to wash away the sins of the people of this land single handed, she requested *Kashyapa* to approach *Lakshmi*, the spouse of the Bow Wielding (*Sharanga Dhar*) *Vishnu* who is possessed of the powers to wash away the sins of the people of al! the three worlds single handed, to extend her helping hand to *Uma* in the form of *Vitasta* to accomplish this task. Therefore, *Kashyapa* venerated *Vishnu* and it was at his request that *Lakshmi* took the form of river *Vishoka* to help *Vitasta* in this noble task. [1]

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[1] *Neelokhtam vachnam kurvastatah prabhriti vai janah I*
Uvaasa sattam hrishtah Kashmiraayam kritaalayah II
Nilamata Purana , v. 381.

[2] *Kritvaa puraani graamaani tirthaanyaayatanaani cha I*
Grihaani cha vichatraani hyuvaasa vasatim Janah II
Ibid. , v., 382.

[3] *Jambuh Shaakah Kushah Kroncha Shaalmali dvipa eva cha I*
Gomedah Pushkarashchaiva dvipah poojyah prathak prathak II
Ibid.., v., 609.

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[1] *Uttaraah Kuravah punya Ramyo Hairanvatastathaa I*
Bhadraashvah Ketumaalashcha varshashchaiva Ilavritah II
Harivarshah Kimpurusho Varsho Bhaaratasangyakah I
Bhaaratsya tathaa Bhedaa pujneeyashcha ye nava II
Nilamata Pu., vv., 611, 612

[2] *Prithivyam yaani tirthaani taani tatra naraadhipa I*
Rishiyaashrama susambhaagham sheetaatapasukham shubham II
Kashmiraamandalam punyam sarva tirtham arindhama I
Tatra Nagaahridah punyastatra punyah shilochayah II
Tatra nadhyastatha punyah punyani ch saraamsyapi I
Devaalaya mahaapunyah teshaam chaiuva tathaashrama II
Ibid., vv., 17,24,25

The religious and mythological lore of *Bharata,* the land of great epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana,* aptly find its echo in this *Purana*. The local replicas of the holy *Tirthas* of the sub-continent the *Gangabala, Prayaga* and *Koti-tirtha*, have been discussed in detail besides those exclusive to the *Kashmira Mandala*. New profiles of gods and goddesses, *Asuras* and *Bhairavas* have been described in this *Purana*. The meeting places of *Vitasta* and *Sindhu*,(a local river), have been named as *Prayaga.* Commenting on the holy *Tirthas* connected with the *Vitasta, Brihadashva* informs king *Gonanda,* "O! Lord of men, the area coming under the confluence of *Vitasta* and *Dhyanadharanya* up to the abode of *Kalpashodasha Naga,* is as holy as *Prayaga".*[2] He also impresses upon the worthy king that the area beginning from the confluence of *Trikoti* up to the *Raupeshvara,* Hara should be treated even more meritorious in holiness to *Varanasi*. [3]

The famous legend of *Parshurama* having annihilated all the *Kshetriyas* from the surface of the earth has been given a local colour in this *Purana.* According to the *Nilamata* some of the *Kshetriyas* had fled to the valley of Kashmir from their homes due to the wrath of *Parshurama*. The *Purana* contains a clear reference to the fact that he (*Parshurama*) who had made twenty-one attempts to attain his goal, did not spare them even in their places of refuge in Kashmir. [4]

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[1] *Atyanta paapa samyuktaan naaham pavitram utsahe I*
Tadatra preraya vibho Lakshmeem Shaarangadhara priyam II
Nilam*ata Purana., v.* 276.

[2] *Vitastaa Dhyanadhaaranyoh sangamaad grihya Paarthiva II*
Kalpashodasha Naagasya yavad bhavanam uttamam I
Taavat kshetram samam punyam Prayagena naraadhipa II
Ibid.,. vv., 1357(b) – 58.

[3] *.Trikotee sangamaad guhya yavad Raupeshvaram Haram I*
Taavat kshetram samam geyam Vaaraanasyathvaadhikam II
Ibid., v,1351

[4] *Ekavimshatimay ghaate praaphte kechuttu Kshetriyah I*
Giridurgamanupraaphtaah Kashmiraayam nripottama II
Tathaapi Raamah taan gatvaa paatayamaasa roshatah II
Ibid ,vv. 1213,1216(b)

The *Purana* contains that after massacre of the *Kshetriyas* on a large scale; *Parshurama* did penance at a number of places and went even to *Kurukshetra* so as to please his forefathers. His worthy manes directed him to proceed to Kashmir to attain salvation so that the blood on his hands could be washed away. [1] *Parshurama* visited the valley of Kashmir in order to get rid of the sins that he had accumulated due to the massacre. On reaching Kashmir he, by chance, went to the confluence of the rivers of *Shuddha* and *Sarasvati* and after bathing there he attained complete purification. The *Purana* also gives a comparison of various *Tirthas* of the valley with those existing in the rest of the sub-continent. *Kashyapa* during his holy pilgrimage visited a number of places of the valley and the author of the *Purana* has compared these places with some of the famous pilgrimage spots of ancient India. [2]

The *Purana* further contains that "One attains heavenly abode when one climbs the *Chitrakuta*. There exists a famous holy place named *Saphtarishi Tirtha* that fulfils all desires of the devotees who visit *Thirtha*. [3]

The holy places known to the Indian sub-continent namely, *Kamatirtha, Sarasvati, Chitrakuta, Bharatgiri, Bhragutunga, Mundaprashta, Ramahrida, Rishikulya*, etc., have also found their mention in the valley according to the *Nilamata*. In this way the *Purana* presents a strong connection of the valley with the whole of the subcontinent during the early and medieval periods of our ancient history. The legends and tales connected with the description of various holy places as described in the *Nilamata Purana*, give a vivid idea of the civilization that existed then in the whole sub-continent. It also indicates the cultural, historical, religious and intellectual refinement that was in full swing in this part of the world. All these tales and stories confirm that the spirit of co-existence and brother-hood that existed among various castes and creeds like, the *Shaivaits,* the *Vaishnavaits,* the followers of *Brahma, Buddha*, the *Nagas,* the *Pishachas*, the Y*akshas,* etc., of the valley later on spread throughout the whole of the sub-continent. The description that we find in the *Nilamata Purana* about the fighting and finally killing of the demon *Jalodbhava,* is, as if, a repetition of the narration as contained in the *Devi Mahatmya* of the *Markandeya Purana*. The writer of the *Purana* has made the narration more interesting by introducing friendly and humorous conversations between various deities like, *Shiva* and *Vishnu; Parvati* and *Lakshmi* during the narration and thus he has made us understand why *Madhusudana* installed the idols of his own self and that of the *Shiva* and *Parvati* at the place where *Hari* had slain *Jalodbhava* [1].

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[1] *Bhavishyasi yathaavat tvam shuddha dehashc a putraka* I
Naapaishyati hi te taavat karebhyu rudhiram dridham II .
Shuddhaa Sarasvati chaiva samyogam yatra gachatah I
Tatra snaatasya Raamasya karau shuddhim upaagatau II
Nila*mata Pu*, vv., 1225, 1229.

[2] *Varshesmin Bhaarate punye shubhaashubha phala prade* I
Pushkaram dushkaragamam Brahamalokapradam Shivam II
Prayagam yagabahulam sarvakilvishanaashanam I
Dharmakshetram Kurukshetram naimisham paapanaashanam II Ibid, vv., 86, 87.

[3] *Chitarkootamathaaruhya Swargaloke maheeyate* I
Tirtham Saptarishim naama sarva kaama phalapradam II
Ibid, v., 1312.

"The Chief of the gods, *Hari* made a joke with *Madhusudana* here (the place where the demon was killed) and got erected his own statue in a laughing posture. *Janardana*, the destroyer of the enemies and lord of the kings, got erected there the statue of *Shambhu* and goddess *Parvati* in that very posture."

The eleventh chapter of the *Purana* begins with an account of the rites and festivals connected with the *Uttarayana*, Summer Solstice. The devotees have been directed to bathe the idol of *Madhusudana* with purified butter on this occasion but the followers of Shiva have been asked to venerate the idol of *Shiva* in their own routine way of venerating Him. In this way the author of the *Purana* has once again presented the *Shaiva* and the *Vaishnava* philosophies, not as conflicting creeds but as complementing thoughts. The author successfully created friendly relation between the two sects of the people of the sub-continent. [1]

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[1] *Taadrisham parihasam tu kritvaa deva varo Hari,* I
Taadrisheem Kaarayamaasa pratimaam aathamanas tatha II
ShambhurDevyashcha Rajendra yathaavrittam arindram I
Taadrisham sa vidhaanam tu kaarayitvaa Janaardanah II
Nilamata Pu., vv., 200 -01.

The doctrine of *Naga* worship has been advocated by the *Nagaraja Nila* and the treatise confirms its importance for the people of Kashmir. In a major portion of the *Purana, Nilanaga* has advocated worship of the *Nagas*, observance of their rites and rituals especially by the people of the valley, besides referring to the worship of a number of other gods and goddesses. This description is spread over a major portion of the book. The worship of *Nila* and the local *Nagas* is also advocated on the occasions of celebrations like the First Snow Fall, specially meant for the people of the valley of Kashmir: [2]

Iramanjiri Poojana has got a special mention in the *Purana* and the description is spread over a number of verses connected with social gatherings and veneration of a number of gods and goddesses. Goddess *Ira* is to be venerated in an *Ira* garden. *Ira* flowers stitched in read thread are to be offered for venerating the *Brahmins*, friends, spouse and the relatives as a matter of respect and honour. Besides, *Rudra, Brahma, Chandra, Surya,* other gods and goddesses are to be venerated with Ira flowers. Offering thousand Ira flowers to *Vishnu* is said to be a gate pass for heaven. *Nilanaga* has advocated his own worship and that of the other *Nagas* with the *Ira* flowers. [3] The fifth and the fourteenth day of the bright half of the month of *Shravana* are exclusively meant for the worship of *Nagas.* In this way the worship of the *Naga Devatas* is spread over a considerable part of the *Purana* though the attention given to other deities and gods is not discouraged. The names like, Rudra, *Hara, Shambhu, Bhava, Mahadeva, Kumara, Vasudeva, Mahendra Pradhyumana, Arjuna, Bhishma, Ram, Lakshmana,, Hanumana,Dhritarashtra, Yudhishthira,* etc., are often mentioned while advocating the *Naga* worship.

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[1] *Gritena snaapyeth Devam swashaktya Madhusudanam I*
Harabhakto Haram Devam yada syath Uttaraayanam II Nilamata Pu., v. 494.

[2]. *Yasminstu vaasare Vipra prathmam patate himam I*
Tatra Poojastu Himvaan Hemantashishrau ubhau II
Mama poojaa cha kartavya sthaana Naagasya chaapyatha I
Phalapatre pradaatave nage Merudbhave tathaa II Ibid., 477 –78

3 *Yadaa jaatah Iraa Devi ircapushpopashobhitaa I*
Iraavaate tato gatwa naareeputraghanaanviutah II
Irau pushpai tatah poojya Dviji stree mitra baandhavah I
Rakhta sutranibaddhaani Iraapushpaani Kaarayet II
Iraa sahasram yo dadhyat Keshavaaya samaahitah I
Tasya tushyanti Deveshah Swargam lokam sa gacchati II
Iraya poojye Rodram Brahamnam, Shashinam, Ravim I
Shubhaam Kareeshineem Durgaam sarva tushyanti devatah II
Iraa Naageshu dayitaa dayitaa me visheshatah II
Iraapushpairbhrisham tena tushti me hi prajaayati II
Ibid.., vv. ,695 ,698. 701,702, 703(b), and 704.

The *Nilamata Purana*, in contrast to many other *Puranas*, contains a magnificent description regarding Lord *Buddha* and his disciples and followers. *Buddha* has been described as an incarnation of *Vishnu* who was sent on this earth by the invisible Supreme Force to up-hold and propagate the already existing *Hindu Dharma.* Generally many of the other *Puranas* have just described the *Buddha* as an incarnation of *Vishnu* while others have just mentioned his name alone. Still others have described him as the preacher of the demons with whose canvassing they met their defeat and complete annihilation from this land at the hands of the followers of *Devas.* All these myths and stories appear to have been incorporated in the *Puranas* just to weaken the impact of *Buddhism* on the general masses. Contrary to this the *Nilamata* addresses Buddha as *Jagatguru* (the preacher and the teacher of the whole world) [1] The celebration of the *Buddha's* birthday, veneration of the idol of the Buddha in the way the *Vaishanavite* venerate *Lord Vishnu*, whitewashing of the dwelling places of *Bodistavas* and offering of food, clothing and books, etc., to the followers of this cult have clearly been described in the *Purana* in a number of verses. The date of the Buddha's birth has specifically been mentioned in the *Purana* in verse No 709 and this fact has been elucidated more clearly in verse No: 710. In this verse of the *Purana* it has been confirmed that the *Buddha* was born when the moon had entered the *Pushya Nakshetra* in the month of *Vaishakha* in the twenty eighth year of Kali era. [1]

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[1] *Vishnudevo jagannaatho Brahman praaphte Kaalao yuge I*
Ashtaavimshattme bhaavee Buddho naama Jagadguruh II
Nilamata Pu. , v., 709.

All these facts clearly indicate the religious co-existence that existed in the valley during the composition of the *Nilamata Purana.* A colourful description of a long list of days of austerity and celebrations contained in the *Nilamata* are in conformity with the beauty of the valley. Holding of celebrations has been kept optional for the haves and have-nots according to their individual economic conditions and status of each person .[2] It is recorded that the *Himalayas,* the seasons of *Hemanta* and *Shishra* should be worshipped while celebrating the First Snow Fall. [3]

The first snowfall is considered to be a day of feasting and merrymaking. The people who drink have been allowed to do it on this occasion as a very special case and they are directed to take special meals of their choice on this occasion: They are asked to sit on the fresh snow, dressed in heavy cloaks ('Sans', *Praavarna*, *'Kash'*, "*Phe'ran*") and clothes and enjoy themselves in the accompaniment of their near and dear ones including their servants But the wise and elderly people are not to wear the heavy woolens (*Kambals*) while bathing the Lingam with purified butter so that their heavy cloaks don't get spoiled. [4]

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[1] *Pushyayukhte Nishaanaathe Vaishaakhye maasi Kaashyapa* I
Tasmaath kaalaat athaarambya kaale bhaavinyatah param II
Buddhaarchaasnaapanam kaaryam Shakyokhtairvachanair tatha I
Sudhaasitaascha kartvya Shaakyavaasaah prayatnatah II
Nilamata Pu., vv., 710, 712.

[2] *Kaaryashchaanyah swashaktya vaa na vaa kaarya dvijotama* I
Ibid.,v., 475 (a)

[3] *Yasmimstu vaasare vipra prathamam patate himam I*
Tatra pujyastu Himvaan Hemanta Shishirau ubhau II.
Ibid., *v., 477*

[4] *Visheshavat cha bhoktavyam bhojanam cha yathecchikam I*
Navo madyastu paatavyo madyapaih patite hime II
Himopari nivishtaishcha guru praavarna ammbaraih I
Mitra bhrityaphtaphta sambandhi sahitaishcha yathaasukham II
Ghrita kambala heenam tu Lingam samsnaapayed budhah I
Ibid v. v. 481,483 and 528 (b).

The author has given a vivid account of "*Fra'vi Punim*", a festival of torching the residual grass and rags of the house on long sticks on the bright fifteenth day of the month of *Phalguna* commemorating the expedition of *Nikumbha*, the *Pishacha* Chief, towards the Sea of Sand to fight the *Pishachas* dwelling there who had become cruel during his absence. The legend advocates that a clay or grass effigy of the *Pishacha* be made and worshipped at noon in every house with music and dance. In the evening the effigy should again be venerated and burnt and then thrown away at a hilltop on the next day. This festival is celebrated even today in the remote parts of Kashmir but with a little amendment to the effect that the effigy is made of grass on a large stick and after torching it in the evening it is carried by the children and the youth into an open and large village grounds and they run the whole ground along with these torches and make that evening more enjoyable and charming. The burnt rod and the effigy are thrown away late at night. The festival has taken shape of a ritual in the present rural Kashmir and is named as '*Frov Zaalun*.' [1]

The existence of the *Iramanjiri* followers, a very delicate and fragile wild-flower, commonly called *Virike'mi* [2] in Kashmiri language, grows very scarcely now on the hilly slops of Kashmir. Its profuse growth or plantation in gardens or availability in such abundance as described in the *Purana* seems as if mythical The *Purana* records that *Iramanjari* was a nymph in the heavens, who being attached to *Vishvavasu,* was cursed by *Indra* to appear as a plant on the *Himalayas.* The *Purana* tells that the people of the valley especially venerated this plant and its flowers in the *Ira* gardens with singing and dancing. The *Purana* also advocates the people to wear new and colourful dresses on such occasions and visit the *Ira* gardens where the follower grows in abundance.[1] The plant, like a variety of other such plants, is now very rare and is at the verge of extinction in the valley. It was found till recently on the hillsides of the valley just at the end of the winter season. Such gardens neither exist in Kashmir now nor are these tender flowers so big as to be stitched into garlands as recorded in the *Purana.*

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[1] *Chaitra maase site pakshe panchadashyam dvijotama* I
Yadhum yati Nikumbastu Pishaachaan Vaalukaarnave II
Tasmaat teshaam tu madhyahne ekaikasya grihe grihe I
Poojaa kaarya prayatnena yathaavat tatnibodha me II
Pishaacham maanushyam kritvaa kaakshyam Dvijottama I
Aarodavyam bhavet shailam sameepastham iti sitithih I
Grihamaagatya kartavyam utsavam geeta vaaditah II
Nilamata Pu.,vv.,683 - 84, 685(a),and 691

[2]. The modern poets of Kashmiri language have used the word, "Virikyo'm" as an early Spring flower in their narrations, as:
Virikye'mi' ta Teka'Bhatne, Suli Aayi jaay ratne, Lagi' toori jaama' tsatne, Gulshan wattan chhu sonuy." " Mahjoor"

The .*Nilamata* gives a vivid description of a number of festivals that are closely associated with dancing and singing. The author has made mention of some of the musical instrument and modes of singing *(Ragas)* on some special occasions. On celebration of the *Phalguna* Festival, it lays emphasis on singing and dancing at night and honour the performance of the singers and dancers on the next morning. [2]

A few such occasions of celebrations are exclusively meant for ladies only and men have clearly been denied participation in such functions. On the eighth day of the dark half of the month of *Phalguna*, the goddess *Kashmira* starts menstruating and only ladies have been advised to bathe her with the help of the twice-born and with the water that contains the medicinal herbs. [3]

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[1] *Iraa naamaaphsaraah purvam shaftaa Shakrena Kaashyapa* I
Vishvaavasoh samprayuktaa suropasthaana varjitaa II
Sthaavaratvam anupraaphtaa Himvatyachalottame I
Bahudhaa saa vibhaktaangee Nikumbhe nirgate bahih II
Iraa vaate tato gatva naaree putra ganaanvitah II
Suvaasah svonulifiaangah suchitah susamaahitah I
Iraa pushpaiastathaa poojyaa dviiastree mitra baandhawah I
Rakhta sutra nibaddhaani Iraapushpaani kaarayet II
Nilamata Pu., vv., 693 - 94, 695(b), 696(a) and 698.

[2] *Geeta nritaistathaa vaadhyai raatrau kaaryah prajaagarah* I
Diteeye ahni tatah praaphte prekshaa deya dvijottama II
Nartakaaraam Nataanaam cha chaaranaanaam tathaiva cha I
Ibid., 546- 47(a).

[3] *Streebhistu poojaa kartavya maanushair na kathanchana* I
Snaapya streebhir bhavet devee krishnapakshaashtameem tu taam II
Ibid , v., 552.

The *Purana* contains some references of bestowing honour on the women-folk during the period under discussion. The instances of the coronation ceremony of *Yashowati* to the throne of Kashmir under the orders of Lord Krishna, is sufficient to explain that the women of the time were not confined to the four walls of the household. The participation of the women in the *Kaumadi Mahotsava* and accepting of the presents by them from their husbands and friends of their families, gives more weight to this assertion. She is depicted as an active helper in the family chores and a close associate of her husband through her participation in the work relating to the fields during the days of sowing and harvesting. Her participation in the worship of plants and trees in the gardens, her active role in the water sports and her taking gifts from her close relatives on the eve of certain festivals, is a clear indication that she had a respectable place in the society in those days. [1]

The *Nilamata* has a different story for the observance of New Year's Day, describing it as *Samvatsara*. Since that highly devoted *Kashyapa* liberated the land of the valley of *Kashmira* on the full moon day (*Paurnmashi*) of *Kartika,* naturally the 1st day of the dark half of *Marghashirsha* is advocated to be celebrated as a festival for all those who are well-to-do, possessing a happy mood and joyous mind. They, surrounded by good people, should wear new clothes and. listen to music and dancing for the whole day and night. They should feast in the company of their family members. It has further been said that the people who are given to drinking may drink on this special occasion without any restriction from any quarter [1] The *Purana* has also discussed in detail the celebrations of the *Nava Samvatsara* [2] and the narration is extended over more than eighty four couplets form cantos 27 - 30 of the book. On the 1st day of the bright half of *Chaitra,* the worship of *Brahma* is advocated. The other festivals as discussed in this part of the *Purana* are the celebration of M*ahashanti* for the affluent persons of the society for preservation of their wealth. [3]

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[1] *Swalankritena bhoktavyam dviendra nava vaasasaa I*
Suhridbhirbandhubhih saardham Brahmnaishchaanuyayibhih II
Rakhta vastrayugam deyam subhagaa Brahamni tu ya II
Swasaa pitriswasaa yaa cha mitrapatnee tu ya bhavet I
Utsavam chaiva kartavyam geeta nritta samaakulam II
Bhushinairbhushitaabhicha kreeditavyam naraih saha II
Stribhirbhaavyam sugandhaabhih suvastraabhishcha tat dinam II
Kreeditavyam visheshyena kumaribhistatha jale II
Pujaneeyaashcha kartavyam stribhir gatwaa phaladrumam II
Nilamata Pu.,v v, 415, 473(b),474(a),(b)I538, 544.557.741 and 822.

The *Nilamata* concludes with a conversation between *Janmejaya* and *Vaishampayana* and the latter relates to the former the *Vitasta Mahatmya* that, besides giving a detailed account of the River *Vitasta*, includes a comprehensive description of almost all the rivers, rivulets and springs (*Nagas*) that appear and flow through various parts of the valley. *Vyasa* told his own disciple *Janmejaya*, who confirmed that the *Purana* could not be included in the list of the *Mahapuranas* as it had local importance and was not so useful for the Sub-continent as a whole though the service that it rendered to the humanity could not be denied. [4]

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[1] *Kaartikeyam samateetaayam sampraaphte prathamehni I*
Kashmiraa nirmitaa purvam Kashyapena Mahaatmanaa II
Tasmaat tatra dine kaaryamutsavam sarva maanavaih I
Swashitaih swanuliphtaangaih suchitaih sujanaavritaih II
Shrotavyam geetavaadhyam cha tathaa sevyam cha mangalam I
Paanam cha paanapaih peyam vastram dhaaryam tatha navam II
Nilamata P,,vv., 465-67

[2] The word *Samvata* is presently in common use in almost all the astrological formations and calculations but *Samvatsara* as a substitute for the Astrologer is no more in vogue now. (Author)

[3] *Chaitra shokla samaarambhe prathme ahni Kaashyapa I*
Pitaamahasya kartavya tadaa poojaa vichakshanaih II
Tasminn eva ahni kartavya Mahaashaanti dvijottama I
Aaduyena rakshanaarthaaya shriyastat prapanaaya cha II
Kathiteyam Mahaashaantih sarvaagh vinisdanee I
Sarvotpaataprashamanee Kaliduhswapna naashinee II
Krtitvopaasaam jagadbhartuyaanti sthaanaanvatah param I
Swani swani dvijashreshtha hrishtapushtaa divaukasah II
Nilamata Pu., vv. .583, 585, 657, and 667.

[4] *Iti evam ukhtam Janmejayasya Vyasasya shishena mahaavritena I*
Kshiphtam na yad granthagurutwabheetya samagra shaastraih khalu Bharate vai II Ibid., v. 1452

Vasuki Kunda at Bhadrawah

3. *The Vasuki Purana*

In the *Vaivaswata Manavantara, Daksha Prajapati* married thirteen of his daughters to *Kashyapa*, the son of *Marichi*. Among them, the two namely *Kadru* and *Vanita* were jealous of each other and they would find faults with each other. From *Kadru*, were born the *Nagas* and *Vanita* gave birth to *Garuda* and *Aruna*. But their jealousy did not end. One day both of them saw a black haired horse, *Uschaishravas* emerging out of the sea. *Vanita* pronounced that the horse possessed white hair while Kadru said that it was black. Both of them laid a bet and agreed to be a slave to the one who was right. In the mean time the horse reached close and it was found that the horse was black. Thus *Vanita* was proved wrong and enslaved by *Kadru*. She became a direct target of her torture. *Garuda*, besides being faithful son of *Vanita,* was also the ride of *Vishnu*. Distressed, he expressed his anguish before his master, who advised him to approach *Indra* for the removal of his worries. *Indra* gave *Garuda, Soma* for the freedom of his mother and he also got a boon from *Indra*- the ability to eat the *Nagas* for their enmity with his mother. This gave promotion to the enmity between the two that resulted in the destruction of the *Nagas* at the hands of *Garuda*.

Our ancient scriptures contain detailed description regarding the *Nagas* and their abodes in the whole of the sub-continent. The *Shrutis* and *Smritis* abound with such narrations. Great Epics, like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* have given due place to such narrations. In the *Rig Veda* there is a reference to a tribe named *Vritra* and the followers of this hilly tribe are said to be serpent worshippers. The *Mahabharata* and the *Shatapatha Brahman* mention a number of serpent worshipping tribes and name them as *Danavas* or as ferocious as the *Vritra* tribe of the Rig Veda. The *Mahabharata,* while narrating the episode of the burning the *Khandava (Desha*) area for the expansion of the *Pandava* kingdom, has for the first time narrated that the area was ruled by the *Naga* king (*Sarpa Raja*)

Takshaka, who was saved from this devastating fire as he had gone to *Takshishila* at that time and was not present in *Khandava Vana*. It is also recorded that his son, *Ashvasena*, escaped this fire miraculously. *Indra,* the friend of *Takshaka*, tried his best to save the area from the wrath of the *Pandavas* but he could not stand before them for they fought under the joint command of Lord *Krishna* and *Arjuna*. So *Takshaka* after his return from the *Takshishila* took a vow to avenge the *Pandavas*. The narration appears to be an attempt made by the ancient Aryans to annihilate the aboriginal wild tribes. [1] In order to establish the ancient legacy of the *Nagas,* the *Mahabharata* clearly states that the great grandfather of *Vasudeva* was a *Naga* Chief, *Vasuki*. [2] The *Ramayana* has its own version of the story of the *Nagas*. It says that the *Rakshasas* were more attracted by the *Naga* maidens whom they captured by force. It also says that *Ravana* attacked the cities owned by *Vasuki Naga* and after defeating him he plundered his kingdom and took scores of *Naga* women as war booty. [3] Our *Smritis* quote fifteen *Naga* Rajas that existed in the sub-continent to whom we offer our oblations while performing various rites. [4] These are: Vasuki *Nagaraja, Pushkar Nagaraja, Takshaka Nagaraja, Chakrahasta Nagaraja, Ailapatra Nagaraja, Daityakhya Nagaraja, Yatudhana Nagaraja, Shankhapala Nagaraja, Fanishwar Nagaraja, Padam Nagaraja, Mahapadam Nagaraja, Nila Nagaraja, Shesha Nagaraja, Ananta Nagaraja,* and *Kulik Nagaraja,*

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[1] *Takshakastu na tatraaseet Sarparaajo mahaabalah. I*
Dahimaane vane tasmin Kurukshetre abhavattadaa II
Ashvasenastu tatraaseet Takshakasya suto balee I
Sa yatnam akrotteevarm mokshyartham havyavaahanaat II
Mahabharata. (Gita Press Ed.), I. 218., 4-5.

[2] *Tadaa Dauhitra dauhitrah parishvakhta supeeditam I*
Supreetashçhaabhavat tasya Vaasukih sa mahaayashah II
Ibid., I. 127, 65

[3] *Purim Bhogavateem paraapya paraajitya cha Vaasukim II*
Takshakasya priyam bhaaryam paraajitya jahaara yah I
Naagakanya varaarohah purnachandra vibhaananaah II
Pramathya Rakhysendrena Naaga kanya balaatt dhritah II
Ramayana. III. 32, 13b-14a., V. 12., (b),21-22]

[4] *Karamakaandi* Pt. II., Ed..by Pt. Keshav Bhatt, Year 1933, Page 182.

The *Nilamata Purana* contains what *Nila Naga* has told to the old *Brahman, Chandradeva,* about the observance of the *Vrittas, Utsavas*, rites and rituals that the immigrant Aryans had to observe to enable them their stay in the valley for the whole year. At the outset of the narration the author has dealt with the origin and development of the *Nagas*. In fact *Maharshi Kashyapa* wanted to settle the *Nagas*, his progeny, safely due to their persecution by *Garuda*. He advised *Naga Raja Vasuki* to approach *Vishnu* to bring an end to the enmity between the *Nagas* and *Garuda* and *Vishnu* directed him to reside in the safe lake of *Satisara* in the company of other *Nagas*. [1] In this way *Vasuki* acted on the advice of *Vishnu* and resided in the *Satisara* in the accompaniment of other *Nagas*, without any fear from *Garuda*. [2] *Gonanda* was anxious to know the number of *Nagas* and their abodes in the valley that *Nila* had named in his narration. While expressing his thoughts before the old *Brahman Chandradeva, Brihadashva* gives a list of 603 *Nagas* headed by *Nila Naga* who resided in different parts of the valley and who, besides being obedient to *Nila*, were said to be great favorites of high minded *Vasuki Naga* as well. [3]

It has been a general trend with the authors of different *Puranas* to associate different incarnations of Lord *Vishnu* with different places of the sub-continent. Contrary to this the *Vishnudharmottara Purana* has rightly regarded the *Matsya* incarnation of *Vishnu* with the valley of Kashmir due to the fact that the famous mountain peak of *Naubandhana* exists in

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Brihadashwa:

[1] *TamaahaaVaasukim Devo Bhagawan Bhayavihvalam II*
Sateedesheatra punyode sarasyambarasamnibhe I
Dharmishthaih sahito Naagair vasaswam itivikrama II
Nilamata Pu., vv. 68 (b) 69.

2 *Vasukinshacha tathaa chakre Deva devasya bhaashitam I*
Tatrasthaanaam cha Naagaanaam naaseed Garadato bhayam II
Gonanda uwaacha: *Ibid., v. 73.*

3 *Pradhaanena tu ye Naagaah Kashmiraayam kritaalayah I*
Naamastu samaachakshva shrotam ichami taan aham II
Sarve varapradaa Naagaa sarve Nilamanuvrittah I
Sarve atidayitaa Raajan Vaasukeh sumahaatmanah II
Ibid., v.v. 914, 983.

the Kashmir range of mountains.[1] The same fact has been described in the *Nilamata Purana* but in a different way. To make the point more clear, the latter narration contains that Sati takes the form of a boat and Manu places the seeds of all creation in it. Vishnu in the form of a *Matsya* (a fish) carries it to the *Naubandhana* Mountain Peak with the help of His horn. In other words, the description of the story differs in both the narrations.[2]

Vasuuki Purana is a short sketch of the religious places of the small valley of *Bhadrawah* also known as *Chota Kashmir*. The narration is spread over five hundred and one *Shalokas. Vasuki Naga* is considered as the prime deity of the area named as '*Bhadravakash*' in the *Purana*. This fact has been dealt in detail the said treatise. The whole area of *Bhadrawah* has been defined as the area governed by *Vasuki Naga*. The author of this *Upa-Purana*, Soma has tried to narrate the legend of the *Vasuki's* abode of *Bhadrawah* as an integral part of Kashmir valley. It can safely be said that it is a local *Mahatmya* and can be regarded as an *Upapurana,* confined to describing the geographical boundaries of a small portion of the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Dr. S. C. Charak in his book, "*History and Cultures of Himalayan State*", has given a detailed description of the *Naga* cults of the Northern India including the State of Jammu and Kashmir. While refuting the ideas expressed by a host of scholars, Dr. Ved Kumari Ghai has rightly suggested that "The most plausible suggestion in this behalf is that the *Nagas* were the aboriginals inhabiting Kashmir and other parts of North India before the advent of the *Vedic Aryans* and the latter fought with them as well as the

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[1] *Sindhukule Varaaham cha Shaaligrame Trivikramam I*
Kaashmireshu tathaa Matsyam Saagre Vadvaanalam. II
Vishnudharmottara pu., III, 121; 3.

[2] *Tadaa [illegible] cha naavam Jagadguruh I*
Matsyaroopadharo Vishnuh shrange kritvaapakarshati II
Nilamata Pu., v., 41,

Pishachas and pushed them to the South, East and West" corners of the subcontinent.[1]

Most of the scholars are not of the unanimous opinion regarding the date of this *Purana*. Some scholars consider that "*Soma*", the author of this *Purana* is the same *Somadeva* who is considered to have authored the world famous book *Katha Sarita Sagara.* In view of the fact that the *Purana* is deeply influenced by the dramatic work of *Harsha*, entitled, "*Nagananda*" and considering that the literary structure of both the texts is uniform; we can safely put the *Vasuki Purana* to be a creation of the eleventh century A.D.

Once upon a time, goes the story of the *Purana*, a childless king of this beautiful land, *Jeemutaketu* got a boon from the Tree of Heaven (*Kalpavriksha)* in the form of a son, *Jeemutavahana*[2] who later on approached the holy tree for the removal of want and poverty from the surface of the world. Accordingly pure gold rained from the heavens to mitigate the worries of the common man of his father's domain. The area ruled by his father, *Jeemutaketu* was bestowed with riches and prosperity instantly. The prosperity of his subjects became a source of trouble for the enemies of *Jeemutavahana's* father and they invaded his kingdom. An ascetic by nature, *Jeemutavahana* stopped his father from fighting the enemy and requested him to leave the palace. In this way the father and the son left their places of residence to live on a mountain peak called *Malayanala* along with their family. Here *Jeemutavahana* fell in love with a demi-goddess girl, *Malayawat*i. He also developed a close friendship with her brother *Vasu* and related to him the story of his previous births when he was named as *Vasudatta,* the son of *Mahagana*, a famous merchant of *Vallabhi.* While traveling as a merchant, thieves caught him and they wanted to sacrifice him before goddess *Chandi*. A king of the *Bhila* tribe saved him from being sacrificed. The *Bhila* king introduced him to a white lionriding girl. Here the story relating to the previous births of the prince came to an end and the new story regarding his second birth started when *Parvati* sprayed holly water from her spout on *Jeemutavahana* to coronate him. *Jeemutavahana* advised *Garuda* to subdue his jealousy and deal peacefully with the *Nagas*. *Garuda* and the *Nagas* acted on his advice and retreated to their native places of residence. In order to win over the blessings of *Shankara* for *Jeemutavahana, Garuda* approached *Shankara* with the request to restore the prosperity of *Jeemutavahana* as he saved the *Nagas* at the cost of his own life and that he had made up his mind to give good governance to his people. Emboldened by the encouraging news form *Garuda, Jeemutavahana* returned to his native place. This is followed with a detailed description of the five places where *Vasuki* had stayed so as to grace *Jeemutavahana* while returning to his native kingdom. These are:

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[1]. The *Nilamata Purana*, - A Cultural and Literary Study, By Dr. Ved Kumari 2nd Edition, 1988, page 58.

[2]. This character appears to have been borrowed from the famous Epic *Ramayana.*

1. Kalinga in the Vindhiyachal region;
2. Kedarnatha on the Kailasha Hills;
3. *Chitrakuta*, The famous mountain range,
4. *Prayaga* (Kashmir) at the confluence of *Vitasta* and *Sindhu* rivers;
5. Bhadra Aashrama (Bhadrawah), in Jammu region.

A detailed description of all the *Tirthas* that are enroute our pilgrimage to the *Vasuski Naga* follows. The *Kailash*a Mountain (known locally as *Kapilaasha*) has been named as *Vasuki Mandala* and *Kapila, Himatoya, Sikhta-shila, Garudasana, Vasuki Kunda* are the *Tirthas* situated there. *Bhagirathi, Jahanvi, Mandakini, Shwetaganga, Atulaganga, Sarasvati,* are mentioned as holy the rivers of this *Mandala*. Some of the confluences of the rivers like, *Irawati, Atulaganga; Bhagirathi* and *Shyama* have been mentioned as the holy places of pilgrimage. The famous rivers and rivulets of *Bhadravakasha* (*Bhadrawah)* are mentioned as, Haluna, *Nanda, Hatha, Kalindi*: and *Arani Kaumari*. The holy spots and *Tirthas* like *Nartic (Nalathi*) decorate the upper region of this beautiful land of *Bhadrawah* whereas *Vrittashila* ornaments its central region and *Bhadrashila, Guhaleshwara, Pushkar Tirtha* are situated on the

Neeru river banks. *Kapila Devi* and *Bhadra Devi* are the spots of pilgrimage of this area.

The main deity of *Vasuki Purana* is the *Vasuki Naga* but the other gods; goddesses and deities have honourably been mentioned in the book. Persecuted by the *Gharuda, Vasuki* takes shelter at the feet of *Brahma*. *Shiva* honours *Vasuki* by confirming his living in the lake of *Vasu*. He also confirms that *Vasuki* and *Shiva* are basically one and the same. The deities like, *Ganesha, Parvati*, the attendants of *Shiva (Nandighanas)*, *Vishnu, Lakshmi*, demi-gods like, *Gandarvas, Vidhhyadharas, Lokapalas, Matrikas* and *Yoginis*, etc., have also been mentioned in this *Purana*. Actually the legend of the *Purana* starts with the conversation between Shiva and *Parvati*. The usual rites like, charity, fasting and veneration on the eve of the local festivals, performance of *Shraaddha* and *Yajnya* have been discussed in detail in the treatise. In this way we can call it a local *Purana* or a *Mahatmya* which is a source of light to illuminate the past and medieval history, civilization, society and rituals of this hilly and secluded part of the Jammu and Kashmir State.

Chapter ii

THE TIRTHAS OF KASHMIR

Abodes of Mother Goddess and Shiva
on Mahadeva and Zabarvan

We, the Pandits of Kashmir, are an ancient people. Our documented history goes back to more than five thousand years. When the valley was drained of its water in ancient times, human groups began their settlements on this land. In this process the new settlers had to intermingle and live with the aboriginals. Because of historical and geographical imperatives peculiar to the valley of Kashmir guarded by the lofty mountains on all sides, they remained more or less segregated from the rest of the world. Thus Kashmirian people held their age old practices almost unchanged and uninterrupted. This is what we draw from the *Nilmata Purana* and. other treatises of historical importance. At the end of the day, all racial groups involved in the process of forging one uniform social pattern, converged into the *Aryan* mainstream of *Vedic* orientation that led to the formation of somewhat uniform social and cultural ethos of the emerging society of ancient Kashmiris.

During the long period of our chequered history, the indigenous Kashmiri has weathered many cultural cataclysms and braved many historical catastrophes. Millennium after millennium they went through intense social turmoil and civilizational onslaughts, yet the resolute people had to look for a new spirit released by these catastrophic events. But the upheaval that started in the Kashmiri society from the early 14th century had far reaching consequences for the entire indigenous community that had emerged as a single civilizational block out of a diverse social structure. The upheavals virtually demolished the very roots of the millennia old social and cultural structure that had served as an anchor for the survival of the indigenous people and it could not be reassembled till date even by bits and slices so as to rebuild it to its ancient grandeur once again.

The baffling question that still remains without a precise answer is how this small and rather negligible remnant of the indigenous people have managed to hold on so tenaciously and at great pains, to its antique social and cultural heritage and its symbols despite the hostile environs threatening its survival almost continuously. Like all groups of indigenous people elsewhere, subjected to external physical and civilizational incursions, the Kashmiri Pandit also had to devise through intuition means and methods of his survival. Its commendable aspect is that in the great struggle for socio-cultural survival, the Pandits laboriously carried from generation to generation, the rather cumbersome baggage of their almost all the identity symbols.

As has been hinted at the beginning, the Vedic civilization essentially remained the prime focus of ancient Kashmirian culture. From the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Samhitas* and other *Shrutis*, *Smritis* and *Sutras*, the indigenous Pandits drew their philosophy, mythology and civilizational trappings. There is a plethora of evidence to show that the indigenous Kashmirian Pandit willingly identified himself with the religious and mythological mainstream of Bharata, the land of great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. He adopted the Vedic deities with their supernatural powers as his mythological mainstay that established them at his choicest places and environment in the valley and he created local replicas of the holy tirthas like Gangabal, Prayaga and Koti-tirtha, besides those exclusive to his Kashmira Mandala. He gave new spiritual dimensions and profiles to Vedic gods and goddesses, Asuras and Bhairavas. This was his cultural ingenuity. Yet his rites, rituals and customs remained closely appended to the Vedic phenomenon. In this way Kashmir possessed an elevated position as far as the number of sites of holy places are concerned and in the words of Pandit Kalhana, the great historian of Kashmir, 'There is not a space as large as a sesame seed without a Tirtha [1]', throughout the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

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[1] Kalhana Pandit, *Rajatarangini* Book I, v. 38.

i. Temple of Shiva at
The *Shankaracharya Hillock*

The valley of Kashmir is a drained lake basin surrounded by a cluster of snow-clad mountains, hills and hillocks on all sides. All these clusters vary in length, breadth and height. The vegetation on these ranges is also numerous, varied and numerous. The south-western portion of the valley is guarded by the lofty Pirpanchal Range whereas its south-eastern sides are decorated by the majestic Himalayas. The whole of its northern range is covered by the Zanskar range – an extended branch of the Korakaram *R*ange of mountains. All these mountain barriers that surround the whole valley had a direct impact on the preservation of the culture and history of this land that had remained, to a great extent, away from the major upheavals and changes that took place in the rest of the sub-continent from times immemorial. This fact has been well described in a number of our ancient treatises including the *Nilamata Purana*.[1]

Mahadevagiri is the westernmost peak of the highest ridge of the range of lesser mountain range lying between the small valley of Sindhu to the north and the centrally located mountain Vaishravana, locally known as Vasturvana. In between these two lofty mountains there is a lesser mountain range that extends from the Mahadevagiri up to the Vasturvana that serves as a protection wall to the Dal Lake from north to south and it is known as the Zabarvana hills. This whole range is called Mahadevagiri in the annals of our ancient Kashmir and the *Nilamata* has given a beautiful description of visiting the abode of Tripurari, Hari, on the Mahadevagiri after having a bath in the stream named in the *Purana* as Mahori, the outlet of the Dal Lake which in the common Kashmiri language is called “Ma‘r” [2]

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[1] *Adrishyam pararaashtraanaam tadbhayanaam akovidam I*
Durgatvaad asya deshasya parachakrabhayam vinaa I
Nilamata Pu., vs. 18 (a),869(a).

[2] *Tripureshaagritah punyam avagaahya tu Mahurim I*
Mahaadevagirim drishtwa Rudraloke maheeyate II *Ibid.*, v. 1371.

In this way, the mountains, besides being abodes of a number of deities, also served as the places of spiritual attainment for the saints and seers of the valley from times immemorial. The founder father of modern Shaivism and Pratibhigya Darshan, Vasugupta who lived in the first quarter of the ninth century A.D, and who is said to have found the *Shiva Sutras* engraved on a rock on the Mahadevagiri, as contained in the *Shiva Sutra Vimarshini* of Kshemraj, often visited the abodes of Shiva and the Mother Goddess that grace the hillocks of the Zabarvana and the Mahadeva. It is also said that on his retirement he lived as a hermit in the foot-hills of the Mahadevagiri till he attained final Salvation.[1]

In the *Rajatarangini* of Kalhana there is a reference that Ashoka, the Great (3rd century B.C.) visited the shrine of Shiva Bhutesh near the famous Sharada Tirtha, a shrine of repute dedicated to the goddess of wisdom, Sarasvati. It is also held that the great king got the boon of a son from here. The valley of Kashmir fascinated the king to the extent that he is said to have founded the city of Shri Nagri, 'the city of Lakshmi'- the goddess of wealth, now called Srinagar. Jalauka, the worthy son of the Ashoka, ascended the throne of Kashmir and he is reported to have erected the Shrine of Jyeshta Rodra in the vicinity of Shri Nagri, surrounded by the famous Dal Lake, Sodra [2]. A hoard of kings followed at the end of Jalauka's reign till the chronicler mentions the name of Gopaditya, who ascended the throne of Kashmir on the death of king Aksha, the son of king Nara II. [3] It was during the reign of king Nara that the famous cave abode of Shiva was discovered at Amreshwara close to the Sushramnag. The chronicler records that king Gopaditya got constructed the temple of Jyeshta Rodra on the Gopadri hillock (as Shankracharya was named then). It is also recorded that he invited the learned Brahmins from the

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[1] P.N.K.Bamzai, *A History of Kashmir*,1973, Ed.,. p. 252.
[2] Kalhana, *Rajatarangini* Book I, v. 124-126.
[3] Ibid, Book I, v. 338-39.

Aryadesha and got them settled at the Gopa Agrahara, presently known as Gupkar at the foot of the Shankracharya hillock. [1]

King Gopaditiya, the great grand son of Meharkula, (5th Century A.D.) is credited with the building of the temple of Jyeshteshvara on the Gopa Hill. The word, "Gopa" corroborates with the present nomenclature of the slope of the hillock named Gupkar and it is also confirmed that the hillock of Shankaracharya was previously known as Gopadri and was held with great religious sanctity. [2] The *Nilamata* has recorded that Kashmir is a virtuous land comprising all the tirthas of the world. It comprises the sacred lakes of the Nagas, the holy mountain peaks inhabited by gods, spiritual hermitages, holy rivers and sanctified rivulets. [3]

The temple on Shankracharya hillock is most splendid monument of Hinhu architecture of ancient Kashmir that attracts the attention of all the visitors who visit the beautiful valley of Kashmir. It is situated on the commanding hill top of the Gopadri hillock close to the summer capital of the State and is approximately 1000 feet above the ground level of Srinagar city. Basically the old ruins of the temple are based on a solid rock on which the whole sanctum sanatorium is situated. A look from a short distance on the basement of the main shrine makes one to understand that the building has been rebuilt a number of times till it has assumed the present magnificent shape. There are a number of stair flights with varied number of steps that enable one to reach to the terrace surrounding the main shrine. The visitor to the main shrine has to follow a single stair comprising approximately 10 steps to reach to the inner chamber which is of a circular shape of 14 feet diameter with a five foot Shiva Lingam at its centre. The outer platform of the shrine is 100 feet in diameter and, besides the Srinagar city, commands the view of a major portion of the valley.[1]

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[1] .Ibid, Book I, v., 341

[2] Kalhana, *Rajatarangini,* Book Ist.,v.,341,book., viii., vv, 1104,1107.

[3] *Kashmiramandalam punyam sarvatirtham arindhama I*
Tatra Naaga hridaah punyah tatra punyah shilocchayah II.
Tatra nadhyah tathaa punyah punyani saraamsyapi I
Devaalaya mahaapunyah teshaam chaiva tathaashramaah II.
Nilamata Pu.,vs., 24-25.

A section of the people of the valley, call this hillock 'Takht-e-Sulaiman' – the throne of 'Solomon', son of David, the most wise 10th century (B.C.) king of Israel, who is said to have mastered even the realms of spirits and ghosts. They put forth a number of hearsay stories in this behalf but without any written historical or Biblical evidence. There is hardly any dearth of monumental structures in the valley of Kashmir that cover a vast period from the per-historic period up to the Mughal period and even beyond, that have survived till date the vandalism and whimsical behaviour of a small section of people and some of our past rulers and the peculiar climatic conditions of the valley. The structure of this temple resembles the archaeological remains of the temples found at Narastan (Tral Tehsil), Laduva (Pampore Tehsil) and Martand (Mattan, Anantnag) though with negligible differences necessitated by its peculiar location. All these factors safely indicate that this monument of architectural magnificence must have been built between the periods of construction of the first two aforesaid structures and the date of construction of the upper sanctorum can safely be regarded as a 7th century monument though the base of the temple appears to have been constructed much earlier.

There are a number of stories regarding the change in the name of the hillock from 'Gopadri' to 'Shankaracharya'. It goes beyond doubt that the area was a great seat of Shaiva and Budhist learning in the ancient past and hence a place of pilgrimage for scholars and students of the sub-continent even during the reign of Gopaditya as already discussed. Some people believe that Swami Shankaracharya, the 8th century Shaiva philosopher, meditated on this hillock for a considerable time during his visit to the valley when he was on a missionary tour of the sub-continent, hence it was named 'Shankaracharya' hillock. Others say that a discussion took place between the Adi Shankara and Mandan Mishra, his contemporary Budhist, Shaiva Acharya of Kashmir, regarding some of the tenets of

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[1] Also please see P.N.K.Bamzai, *A History of Kashmir*, 1973, Ed., p. 291.

Shaiva/Budhist philosophy on this hillock. The discussion continued for 17 days without any break and both answered questions aptly and to the great satisfaction of each other. Thus the supremacy of each another's learning remained undecided during all these days. At the end of all this discussion, the wife of Mandan Mishra came to the rescue of her husband. She asked the Adi Shankara to explain the state of extreme 'Bliss' for a devotee. The Adi Shankaracharya, being a life-time bachelor, could not answer or explain the extreme state of 'Bliss'. He accepted the integrity of Shiva and Shakti as the two components of achieving the 'Eternal Bliss'. This thought gave a new dimension to the then Indian Shaiva philosophy that had a sway over the whole sub-continent. Thus was the superiority of Mandan. Mishra established and the hillock got the new name as a gesture of respect for the guest scholar.

The visitors to the shrine start the journey up-hill from its base at Durga Nag temple situated to the south of this hillock and they generally climb it on foot. Now the Government has constructed an all weather road up to the Kashmir Doordarshan Kendra Relay Station, situated very close to this shrine and the pilgrims visit this shrine using public transport and other means. A huge congregation is held here on all Puranmashis and other days of religious importance including the one held on Shravana Purnamashi, the concluding day of the Amreshwara pilgrimage.

ii. Jyeshteshvara (Zeethi'ya'r)

Shakti Peetha at Zabarvan

Situated at a distance of nearly five Km. to the north-east of the famous Dal Lake on Mahadeva Mountain, there is a small stream known as Tripura Ganga. This served as a resting place during the ancient times when people performed a pilgrimage to the holy Mahadeva mountain peak; but now it has lost its importance as a Tirtha. There is one more important place of pilgrimage presently known as "Zo'kur" that appears a direct derivation from the Sanskrit word, "Chakradhar/ Chakrabrit", meaning "Vishnu". It is situated to the north of the Dal Lake just near Nalah Te'lbal and is nearly equidistant from Tripura Ganga and Gandarbal (Gandrava Bala), a resting place on the route of the pilgrims to the shrine of Mother Goddess Rajnya at Tulamula. Almost all the sources of our ancient history like the *Rajataranginis* of Kalhana, Jonraja, Shrivara, and Shuka, and the *Nilamata Purana* contain a number of references to this effect.[1] P.N. K. Bamzai writes "We are told in the *Siva-Sutra Vimarsini,* that Vasugupta, while residing in his hermitage below the Mahadeo peak, had one night a dream in which *Siva* appeared and disclosed to the sage the existence of certain *Sutras* – embodying the *Siva- S'asana* - inscribed on a rock lying at a certain spot in the valley below Mahadeo peak. The inscribed side, which was turned downwards, would, if he approached the rock early the next morning and touched it, turn round and the *Sutras* would be revealed to him. Vasugupta, as directed in the dream found the rock, which on his touch turned round. Thus the *Shiva Sutras* were revealed to the sage who learnt them by heart and propagated them to the world immersed in spiritual darkness."[2] The rock known as

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[1] .Kalhana, *Rajatarangini*, I.,38,261,270, vii.,258,261,269, viii.,971, 991, 1004, 1064, Jonraja, 601 (Raghunath Singh), 763, (Bombay Ed.,), *Nilamata*, 934.

[2] Bamzai, P.N K , *A History of Kashmir* (2nd Edition 1973) p., 264.He also has pointed out the views of Kshemraja that the *Sutras* were revealed to Vasugupta by Shiva himself in his dream and not found on the rock but the statement is not supported by any reference.

Shankarpal, is still lying on the mountain above Harvan, without a trace of any inscription engraved on it.

From a short sketch of the last *Karika* of *Abhidhavritta Matrika* by Mukul Bhatta, we get the information that Vasugupta was the son of Bhatta Kallata [1]. Kalhana has clearly stated that Bhatta Kallata was a well-known scholar at the court of king Awantivarman who, as stated in the chronicle, was sent on this earth for the benefit of the masses. [2] Bhatta Kallata was a contemporary and a pupil of Vasugupta. Bhatta Kallata, the famous Shaivite scholar of the 9th century, has more lucidly recorded this fact in his commentary on *Spandakarika*, considered to be one of the main treatises on Kashmir Shaiva Darshan [3]. The life and lineage of Vasugupta is not known; however, it is confirmed that on his retirement, the founder of the Trika Philosophy of the Advait Shaiva Shastra, lived as a holy sage in the Sadarhadvana (modern Harvan), behind the Shalimar garden situated to the north-east of Dal Lake, as recorded by his disciples.[4]

The village Ishaba'r is situated close to the Mughal Garden, "Nishat" at the foot of Zabarvana hillock.[5] As recorded in various *Mahatmyas,* this place is also famous as "Gupta Ganga Tirtha among the common Hindu populace of the valley. As per the local legend it is called as "Vamana Ganga,". The legend related to the *Vishnu Purana,* says that Vishnu appeared in the guise of a dwarf (Vamana) Brahman before Bali Danava, a powerful but charitable Rakshas king who had sway over the whole of the universe. In order to curb the powers of Bali, Vishnu in the guise of an old dwar Brahman asked him to give in charity, land equal in the length to his three steps of his feet as Dakshina. Bali readily agreed. In the first step the pigmy Brahman took all the three worlds (Bhoo, Bhuwah and Swah). With the second step he took all the nether worlds. Now no space was left with Bali for the third step of the Brahman. He put his head before the Brahman for the third step. Vishnu, in the guise of the Brahman, was very much pleased at the truthfulness of the king and appeared before him in his real form. It is said that, as per promise, while placing His foot on the head of the demon king, a drop of water fell from His foot, and that is known as Charana Ganga. The same drop of water is said to be the innermost stone lined water tank in the vicinity of the Ishaba'r village known as Gupta Ganga Asthapana. It may be mentioned here that there is a Tirtha similar to and of the same name at Bhadrawah, Jammu province of the J& K state. Close to this holy site (about one km from the proper village Ishaba'r), as contained in the chronicle, is the "Sureshora Ksherta (or Sureshori Tirtha)", sacred to goddess Durga. As the abode of the goddess was supposed to be on a rock that was too steep to hold any structures, a number of remnants of the buildings constructed in honour of the goddess existed on the lesser slopes to the east of the Dal Lake. It appears that a great congregation held every year on the eve of Baishakhi at Gupta Ganga shrine temple, which is a recent construction, has overshadowed the importance of the Sureshori tirtha The *Rajatarangini* of Kalhana contains references to a number of shrines in the vicinity of Ishaba'r village including Sureshori shrine. Actually, neither the location of these shrines nor those of the temples is presently traceable any where though scattered carved slabs and sculptured fragments of stones can be found in the local springs now owned by the private residents of this village [1]. However, the establishment of the world famous Shaiva Ashram by the famous Shaiva scholar and saint, His Holiness, Ishwarsaroopa, Swami Lakshman Joo Maharaj, the last doyen of Kashmir Shaivism, has added to the grace of the locality and restored the past glory of this area to a great extent.

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[1] *Bhatta Kallata putrena Mukulena niropita I.*
Sooriprabodhanaayeyam-Abhidhaavritta Maatrikaa II
Abhidha Vritta Matrika Karika – 15.

[2] *Anugrahaaya lokaanaam Bhatta Shri Kallattaadayah I.*
Awantivarmanah kaale Siddaah bhuvam awaataran II
Rajatarangini, Kalhana Book *V, v. 66.*

[3] *Labdham Mahaadevagirao Mahesha sopnopdhishtaat Shiva Sutra Sindhoh I*
Spandaamritam yat Vasuguptapaadaih Shri Kallatah tat prakati chikaara II
Spandakarika, by Bhatta Kallat.

[4] Krishna Mohan (Dr), Early Mediuval History of Kashmir 1981, P., 293.

[5] Kalhana has given its name as Isheshavara. P.S. *Kalhana, Rajatarangini,* Book II, v. 134.

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[1] *Kalhana Rajatarangini*, Tras. M.A. Stein, Vol. I, Book, V, vv, 37 and 40 (fn). p. 190-91.

The ancient historical texts of the valley including various *Mahatmyas* and, the *Nandi Purana* reveals that Shiva was named as Jyeshteshavara and Jyeshtarudra throughout the length and breadth of the valley for a pretty long period.[1] In the upper ridges to the east of Dal Lake and below the mountain peak of Mahadeva/Harmokh, the deity was commonly known as Jyeshteshavara or Jyashtarudra whereas He was named as Shiva Bhutesh in Nandikshetra [2], the place where Nandi had undergone a penance to please Lord Shiva.

Kshemendra, (11th. Century A. D.), the great Shaiva philosopher was a regular pilgrim to this mountain area as he confirms in his famous treatise *Dasha Avatar Charita*. He also admits that he composed all his works in the vicinity of Tripuresha, 'Trifar' where he generally stayed for rest and peace. This whole area has served as a retreat for some of the great scholars of Kashmir in the remote past and Kalhana has made a number of such references in his *Rajatarangini*. According to P. N K. Bamzai, "Samdhimat-Arya-Raja- voluntarily stayed and even passed the last days of his life as a recluse at the sacred site of Shiva Bhutesh." [3] Some of the great rulers of the valley are reported to have spent the days of solitude after retirement from the state administration in the said area and attained salvation. It is because of this very fact that we have Bhairava Bal at a number of places at the famous sites of the worship of Lord Shiva, like the cave abodes of Shiva at Amarnath Ji,, Ha'ri'sho'r, and at Mahadevagiri, etc.

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[1] The legend regarding the appearance of the Dal Lake at its present site is that Jalauka, the son of Ashoka ascended the throne of Kashmir in 232 B.C. after the death of his father. He is said to have constructed the temple of Jyashtarudra. He worshipped Shiva after he was inspired by the study of *Nandi Purana*. He worshipped Shiva daily after having a bath in the Sodra (spring Naran Nag). One day being engrossed with the work of the administration, he forgot his daily observance and did not take any bath from Naran Nag (Sodra). He was very much disgusted but to his surprise he found that a spring broke forth in the waterless spot close to his palace at Srinagar, which resembled Sodra and its water matched in colour, taste and in all other aspects to it. P.s. Kalhana, *Rajatarangini*,, Book, I vv., 121-129. Also, History of Kashmir by Bamzai ,P.N. K ., II., Ed., 1973, p. 69.

[2] *Nandishwarasya ya murtir duraachaarair na drishite* I
Bhuteshvaram tathaa drishtvaa muchitya sarva kilvashaih II
Nilamata Pu., v.1167

[3] *History of Kashmir* by Bamzai, P.N. K. II Ed., 1973, p. 81.

The whole mountain range stretching to the south of Trifar along the east of Dal Lake to the north-east of the Shankaracharya hill temple of Shiva, is a place of major pilgrimage preferably on the full moon day of every month. The whole mountain area known as Zabarvan, was called Shridvara (the gate to the abode of goddess Lakshmi) in ancient times. The *Nilamata Purana* starts with the words, '*Shri Niwasam Harim Devam...*' , and the *Purana* has dedicated the fifth day of *Chaitra Shukla* to the worship of 'Shri.'. The goddess of wealth has generally been mentioned either as Lakshmi or Karishinee at a number of places in the Nlamata Purana.[1] The valley being guarded by lofty mountains on all sides contained a few mountain- passes that were the only means of access to the main valley in the past. Such passes known as Dvaradveepas, were heavily guarded by high ranking administrative officials of ministerial rank, known as Dvarapatis and the *Rajatarangini* has a number of references regarding this fact. The mountain pass of Mahadev from Zabarvana side, being a direct pass to the Sindh valley in the north, was named as 'Shridvara'.[2] According to the *Nilamata,* Jyeshtesha, or Jyeshtheshvara, situated near Naran Nag, below the mount Haramukata and it was revered as the Nandikshetra also for the penance that was performed here by Nandi, the ride of Shiva [3]. The *Nilamata* has rightly identified the location of Tripuresha also called Jyashtesha just close to the Malini/Mari or Mahuri (Kashmiri Ma'r) – the out-let of water from Dal Lake, commonly known as Dal Gate. It further confirms the sanctity of both the places as Tirthas of repute.[4] The worship of Jyeshtanatha or Jyshteshvara at this place is contained in Adhyaya IV of the *Jyeshteshvara Mahatmya*. According to the legend, this locality took its name from the demons, Tripura and Andhaka, who were destroyed by Shiva with his trident. Hence Shiva is also called, "Tripurari". There is one more legend, which is related to the Pauranic episode of churning of the Ksheer Sagara by gods and the demons. Strife emerged between gods and the demons over the distribution of Nectar that emerged from the Sagara. While distributing it, gods betrayed the demons and the latter became furious and kidnapped goddess Lakshmi and kept her confined in a cave or Gupta Griha presently known as Gupakar, at the foothills of Shankaracharya hillock. Shiva was furious on the action of the Asuras. He asked the Divine Mother to take the form of Zeshta and with the help of his (Shankara's) two Bhairvas, Vira and Vetala, she completely annihilated all the Asuras and restored Maha Lakshmi to Vishnu. Mother Goddess Durga is also worshipped under the name of Sureshori (queen of gods) even to this day. This fact is repeatedly confirmed in the *Durga Saptashati* and other *Saharasranams* of the Mother Goddess. Hence the goddess has also attained the name of "Tripureshori". Kalhana has given a vivid description of this narration in his chronicle; *Rajatarangini*. [1] The chronicle, as continued by Jonraja confirms the exact location of the shrine somewhere between Nishat and Shalimar gardens to the east of the Dal Lake, as mentioned in the foregoing paragraph. He also says that boats also were used to carry pilgrims to this holy Tirtha. [2] It is presently called Zeethi'ya'r. Besides, performing a two day annual Maha Yagnya on the birthday of the deity on the 5th day of the dark fortnight of the month of Jeshta, Havans and a mass pilgrimage to this holy shrine is held on all the Thursdays during the this month. The *Jyeshteshvara Mahatmya* has a different story regarding the Zeethi'ya'r tirtha. It is said that Shiva liberated Parvati in the form of Jyeshta from the Daityas and after her great penance Shiva married her. Thus He took the name of Jyeshtesha, or Jyeshtarudra on marrying her. At present the name of Shiva Jyeshta is borne by the

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[1]. *Nilamate Pu.*, vv.,1, 668

[2] *Kalhana Rajatarangini*, Tras. M.A. Stein, Vol..,I.,v.,214 (fn).vii,v.140, viii.,vv., 178, 1578. Also Nilamata, v, 18 (a) and v., 669 (a).

[3] *Haramukutam iti aakhyatam shringam Himvatah shubham* II.
Jagaama sahsaa Nandi tapase krita nishchiyah II.
Nilamata Pu., vs.,(b)[1086 -87].

[4] *Tripureshaagratah punyam avagaahya tu Maahurim* I
Mahaadevagirim drishtwa Rudra loke maheeyate II
Amreshe narah snaatwa goshatase phlam labeth I
Maalinyam tu narah snatwa dashagodaanaphalam *labeth* II,
Ibid., vs. 1371-72.

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[1] Kalahana *Rajatarangini* , Trans. by M.A. Stein, Rep. 1979 Pts., I-II, vv., 37, 40-41, viii, 506, 744, 2344,2363,2418, and 3365 –70.

[2] *Shrutva tat sthaana mahaatmyam baalisho mantribhih saha* I
Aagaat Sureshoree kshetram naupathena sa jaatuchit II
Rajatarangini by Jonraja, 1972, v. 52.

Lingam which the devotees worship and which is close to the present Zeethi'ya'r Nag, in the vicinity of the shrine.

There is not denying the fact that besides destroying a number of temples of repute throughout the valley, Sultan Sikandar (1389–1413 A.D.) commonly called Sikandar Butshikan, pulled down the famous temples of, Martand, Vijayesha, Ishana, Chakrabrit, and Tripureshvara and no resistance came forth when he broke the reputed idols of the deities like, Sureshori and Varaha, etc. [1]. The names of the shrines contained in the verses of the *Rajatarangini* of Jonraja appear to have been given by the chronicler according to their importance as confirmed by him in his comments in the foregoing foot notes. The mention of the Varaha temple (in verse 602) shows the presence of a Vishnu temple to the north of Dal lake, named Chakradhar that existed in the vicinity of this area in the past. Kalhana has made mention of the Chakradhar temple in a number of verses in the *Rajatarangini*. [2] There is not even a trace of all these temples in this area at present except a small habitat known as 'Zo'kur' close to the north of Dal Lake. After the death of Kalhana, Jonraja, in the absence of any written historical account of the period either in Sanskrit, Persian or Arabic, has rightly given a reference of having recorded from the scanty facts after getting permission from Shriya Bhat who was the Dharmadhikari of Sultan Zaina-ul-Abadin (1420-1470A.D.). This clearly shows that Shri Bhat was a well-wisher of Jonraja, who had reached to the post of a court poet of Zaiunu-ul-Abadin through his good offices and hence his limitation in not expressing the facts more clearly or lucidly is understandable .[3]

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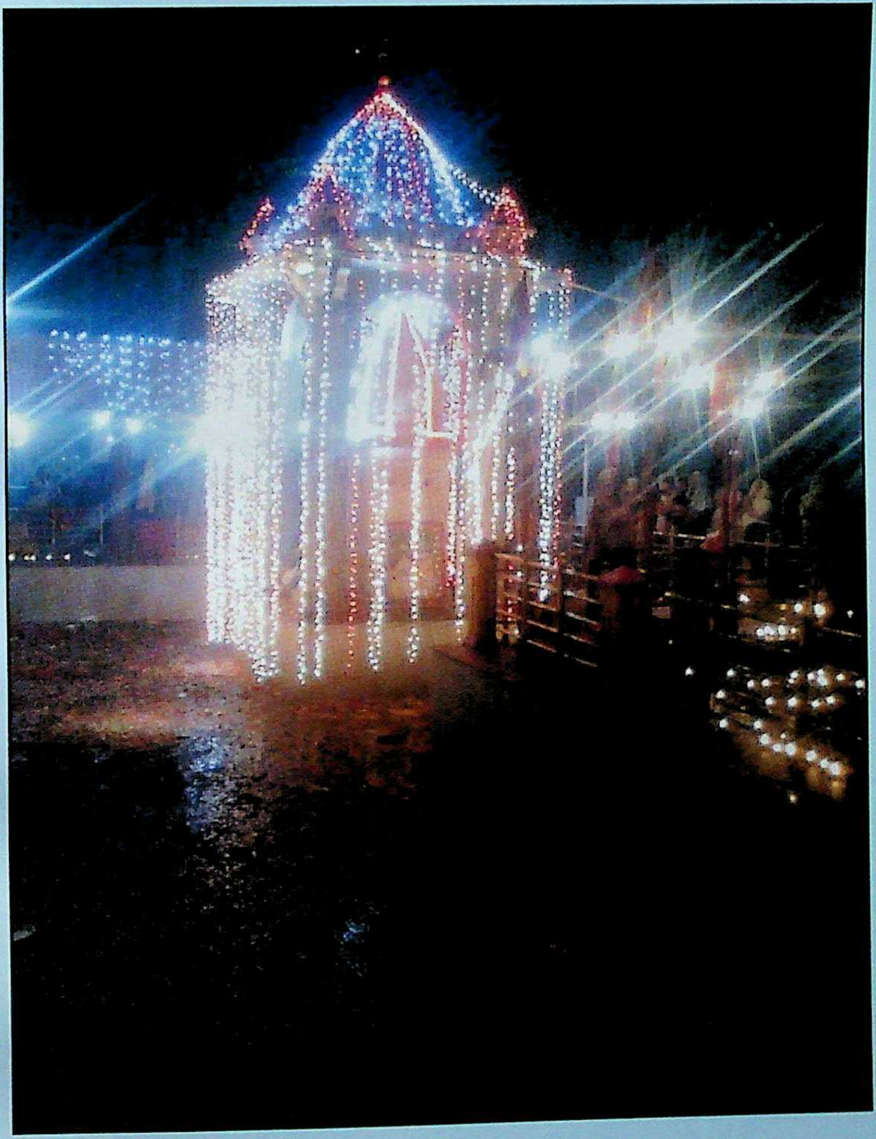
[1] *Maartand Vijayeshaan Chakrabrit Tripureshvoraah I*
Bhagnaa yenaasya ko vignah shesha bhangena kathyate II
Sureshori Varaahaadi pratima bhanga karmani I
Akampat bhiyevor urvi naasya sarvankashaa tu dheeh II
Rajatarangini by Jonraja, 1972, vv. 601-02.

[2] For details please see: Kalahana, *Rajatarangini*, Book, I.vs.,38, 216, 270; Book, VII,vv., 258, 261, 269, and Book, VIII, v.,78.

[3] *Magnaan vismritipaathodhau Jaisinhadi bhupatin I*
Shri Zainallabhadenasya kaarunyat utjihirshatah II
Sarvadharmaadhikaaresho niyukhtasya dayavatah I
Mukhat Shri Shiri Bhattasya prapyaagyam Anavagyaya II ,
Ibid, vs., *10-11*



Shakti Pitha of Rajnya at Tulamula, Kashmir

iii. Ksheer Bhawani

Shakti Peetha of Rajnya

In order to associate with the religious and mythological mainstream of the sub-continent, the Kashmiri Pandit willingly identified himself from the times immemorial with Bharatvarsha by creating local replicas of the holy tirthas that included Gangabal, Prayaga, Pushkar and Koti-tirtha. Besides owning gods, goddesses, Asuras and Bhairavas of the Indian mythology, he formed and shaped his religious texts in conformity with the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Samhitas and the Sutras exclusively meant for the Kashmira Mandala and he enriched his philosophy, mythology and other fields of knowledge to shape his own regional civilization. He also produced his own Samhitas and Puranas, with the result that Kashmir became a place of pilgrimage for the whole sub-continent from ancient times for all its tirthas of repute particularly for the people of the sub-continent.[1]

Every tirtha of the valley has some or the other mythological root, a story behind it and all such narrations or Sutras/Karikas are in the form of devotional songs or Stotras narrated by a number of great sages and seers that we group together as *Mahatmyas*. Thus we have a number of *Mahaatmyas* that pertain to some of our tirthas of repute, gods and goddesses like Rajnya, .Sharika, Sharada, Jwala, Vitasta, Haramukata Ganga, Amreshwara, Ha'ri'sho'r, Nandishwara, Martand, and so on. A detailed account of Maha Rajnya or Ksheer Bhawani located at Tulamula, is contained in a *Mahatmya,* known as *Bringesh Samhita,* written by the famous Sanskrit scholar from southern India, named Bringesh Rishi. Nothing is on record in the annals of our ancient times about this great scholar who appears to have spent the most glorious part of his life in Kashmir exploring and giving detailed account of some of our tirthas However, there is a small rivulet named 'Nalah Bringi' in south Kashmir in the Kutahar Pargana. The name of the stream appears in the

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[1] *Rajatarangini*, Trans. by M.A. Stein, Reprint, 1979.,Vol.I,Book i.,vv., 33.-38.

Lokaprakasha of Aacharya Kshemendra, who lays down its name as 'Bringya'. It is situated at a distance of nearly eight km, to the south-east of the famous health resort of Kashmir, Achhabal, and is also more close to a small village, Lukabhavan.[1] The *Rajatarangini* gives its name as Lokapunya in a number of verses that can be identified with the present village of Larikipore, commonly known now as 'La'rikhpora' or Larkipora. [2] Here exists a small spring called Nagabal near the village and near the basin of the spring there are the remains of a small Summer House probably constructed by some later rulers of the valley with the material and stone slabs of some earlier buildings. The remaining fragments of ancient stone images lie in the water near the spring which the Kashmiri Pandits visit every year on the twelfth day of the bright half of the month of Ashada called, 'Hara' Bah', the annual date of pilgrimage to this tirtha.

The most famous and revered Shakti Peetha of Maha Rajnya, Tripurasundari, an incarnation of Durga, is the Shakti Peetha, Ksheer Bhawani at Tulamula, (78 x 48'long.) and (34 x 13' lat.) situated at a distance of 24 Km to the north of Srinagar, close to the confluence of the Vitasta and Sindhu (a local river). The place is commonly known as Do'darhoma. Shrivara has given the name of this place as Dugdhashyama in his chronicle. It is a small but a beautiful and an attractive village of Teh./ Distt. Ganderbal (Gandarvabala) and is a center of great faith and devotion for the Kashmiri Pandits in and outside the state. The Shakti Peetha at Tulamula has a number of legends connected with it and the most ancient one dates back to the Ramayana period

In the *Bringesh Samhita, Maha Rajnya Pradurbhava,* it is stated that Rajnya was the Ishta Devi (Chief clan deity) of Ravana who worshipped Her in the form of Shyama. On seeing the misdeeds of Her devotee, like the deceitful kidnapping of Sita and his confrontation with Lord Ram who is considered as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, she got annoyed with Ravana and addressed him thus, "Fie upon you O!, Degraded demon, I leave you from hence forth and proceed to my abode of choice in the beautiful Himalayan valley of Satisara – Kashmir.[1] In order to show her displeasure to Ravana, She confined Herself in a toy pot, commonly called Saniva'r in Kashmiri.[2] On the death of Ravana, Lord Ram directed Hanumana to take charge of the Mother Goddess seated in the tiny vessel and proceed with his bestowed strength and power towards north so as to escort Maha Ragnya to her desired abode in the land of Satisara. Mounted on the Nagaraja Ananta and accompanied and guarded by three hundred and sixty serpents, Hanumana planted the pot on his back with utmost reverence and care and proceeded towards the destination. Reaching the land of Sati, Shyama who is also known as Ksheer Bhawani, Rajnya, Tripurasundari and Durgha, became calm and composed on seeing the marshy land of Tulamulaka or Tulamula [3] and offerings to Her remained confined to milk (Sns. Ksheer), Sugar Candy (Qand), purified butter and dry fruit only. Entering the valley of Satisara, Maha Rajnya is said to have touched some of the ancient tirthas of the valley. These include the famous tirthas of: Manzgam (Kulgam), Khanabarnyan (Divsar, Kulgam), Luka Bhawan, Larkipora, (Achhabal, Anantnag), Tikkar (Kupwara), Shailaputri, (Baramula), Haramukata Ganga, to the extreme north of Kashmir and finally reached Tulamula. If we connect all these places on a sketch map of the valley, it will become a mystic figure of a heptagon resembling a rosary bag. The same shape has been given to the spring of Bhawani at Tulamula. It resembles a sacred Yantra of the Mother according to Kashmir Tantra Shastra. It is said that a drop of water oozed out from the Saniva'ri (the toy-pot) at all the seven places mentioned above and these developed into springs – big and small. All these tirthas are hot centers of Divine Mother and are worshipped by the devotees throughout the year especially on the eighth days of the bright half of every month and on all other auspicious days of the year as per details given below:-

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[1] This ancient township of repute had been constructed by the King Lalitaditya and the garden palace in the vicinity of the old structure appears to have been built during the Mughal period. See *Rajatarangini*, by Kalhana, Trans. By M.A. Stein, Reprint, 1979 Vol II., P. 468.

[2] Ibid., Book, IV-v.. 193, Book, VII vv., 1239, 1257, and Book, VIII, vv., 523, 1429.

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[1] *Bringesh Samhita, Maha Rajnya Pradurbhava*, II. 58.

[2] For details of Sanivari, P.S. *Kashmir Hindu Sanskaras* (*Rituals, Rites* and *Customs*) – *A Study*, by S.N. Pandit, year, 2006, pp. 360 –61, and 430-31.

[3] In the spoken Kashmiri language "Tula" also means a soft cover made of cloth in which cotton is inserted for making beddings, pillows, etc., in addition to this, it also means mulberry/fruit tree. The name of the place is mentioned as Tulamulaka in the Rajavali Pataka of Prajyabhatta and Shuka, vv.527,531and in the *Rajnya Pradurbhava* of Bringesh Rishi. But the *Rajatarangini* of Kalhana contains the more accurate name, "Tulamulya" for Tulmula in book IV, v., 638.

1. Manzgam, Kulgam, eighth day of the bright half of Jyeshta,
2. Khanabarnyan, Divsar, Kulgam, eighth day of the bright half of Ashada.
3. Luka Bhawan, Achhabal, twelfth day of the bright half of Ashada.
4. Tikkar, Kupwara, eighth day of the bright half of Zeshta.
5. Shailaputri, Baramula, eighth days of the bright half of Chaitra and Ashwin.
6. Sharada Tirtha, Haramukata Ganga Kupwara, eighth day of the bright half of Bhadrapada.
7. Tulamula,(Gandarbal), eighth day of the bright half of Jyeshta..

In the *Maha Rajnya Pradurbhava*, Bringesh Rishi confirms that Lord Ram and Sita undertook the journey to Ksheer Bhawani on the bright fifteenth day of Ashwin (Puranmashi) after having completed the mission of killing the demon king, Ravana and restoring the throne of Shri Lanka to Vibhishana. The Samhita also says that Vibhishana also visits the holy tirtha of Tulamula every year on the eighth and ninth day of the bright half of Ashwin to have the blessings of the Mother whereas Hanumana stands guard at the very gate of the Mother Goddess which is decorated with Shri Chakra.

In another legend it is narrated that after having made the abode of her choice at Tulamula and other sacred sites, the story of her arrival in the valley remained a secret for a considerable time so much so that nobody knew the actual location of the holy tirtha at Tulamula for a long time. May be social turmoil, cultural onslaughts and the religious persecutions due to the alien rule could have played a part in the neglect of almost all the tirthas and the desire for their search, therefore, must have remained dormant during this period of restraint. It is said that after a thorough study of a number of Dharma Granthas, a pious and a well-read Brahman from Rohni Kadal, Srinagar, Shri Govind Joo Gadoo set out to locate all the tirthas and he succeeded in his quest while searching for some of the major sacred locations. The Dharam Granthas contain that this included the sacred abode of Tulamula as well. [1] There is one more legend which says that a learned and a devout Brahman Krishen Joo Tapiloo, saw Mother Goddess in his dream who had manifested Herself as a serpent and directed Tapiloo to move from Srinagar towards the north-west direction. On his waking up he actually saw a serpent in his room and it started its movement when Tapiloo was fully awake. The devotee followed the serpent and finally reached the spot that he had already seen in his dream. It was the sacred abode of Maha Maya and the serpent demarcated the holy Kunda. The Pandit also marked the place where the serpent immersed itself and vanished into the water of the Kund near the stem of a tree. It is said that from that date onwards the devotees started visiting the sacred abode of Mother Goddess on a large scale for the full year particularly on every eighth day of the bright half of every month. There existed the root stump stem of a Mulberry tree (Kash. Tula-mula) tree in the Jala Kunda of the goddess and the devotees made their offerings to the deity near the root of the said tree. Hence the tirtha is known as Tulamula. (Tula – meaning 'Mulberry' Mula meaning 'Root').The ancient Jala Kunda remained in its original/natural form till recent times.

During the reign of Maharaja Ranbir Singh (1856-1885), Mahakavi Chandi Das, a famous Sanskrit scholar, philosopher, astrologer, ritualistic and a poet, who had authored nearly 40 books, including a number of devotional lyrics, hymns (Stotras) and octaves (Ashtaks) in praise of Maha Rajnya and her other incarnations, was appointed by the king as one of his courtiers who looked after the Darmarth Trust established by the Maharaja. He belonged to Pundriya village of the Haryana State of India. He was at first a court poet of Maharaja of Jaipur and from thence he came to the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab in 1856 A. D. After the coronation of Maharaja Ranbir

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[1] The information is contained in an article on *Ksheer Bhawani* appearing in the Daily Excelsior, dated 25-5-2005, by Sanjeev Bhat. The author has not, however, named the particular *Dharam Granthas* in support [illegible]

Singh as the king of Jammu and Kashmir he was appointed as his court poet heading a galaxy of Sanskrit scholars existing then at the august court of the Maharaja of Kashmir and thus he remained associated with the State for a pretty long time. He was devoted to Maha Rajnya and he wrote a number of philosophical hymns in the Ashtak - verse formation in Sanakrit. The then Dogra rulers of the State might have helped this saintly scholar in the development of the area at Tulamula as a Tirtha center. The present temple of the Goddess at the site of Tulamula has been constructed under the guidance of His Highness, Maharaja Pratap Singh in the year 1896 A. D. and the beautification of the area was also taken up under the royal patronage. The main abode of the Goddess is made of white marble on a raised square platform in the middle of the main spring, called, Vasa- Sthala. The spring shaped as a Rosary bag with a heptagonal formation, is also lined with white marble. The surrounding area is paved with Divari Stone slabs. The whole area surrounding the tirtha abounds with Chinar trees, (called Booni' in Kashmiri language) that add to the beauty of the area.[1] Now a considerable part of the surrounding area has been paved with white marble and a cluster of Dharamshallas has come up for the comfortable stay of the pilgrims throughout the year.

The main congregation is held on the eighth day of the bright fortnight of Jyeshta (Shokla Ashtami) as the Jayanti (birthday) of the Mother Goddess. The colour of the water of the holy spring at Tulamula on which the beautiful abode of Mata Rajnya is built in white marble and which resembles a rosary bag, changes occasionally, especially on this auspicious day. There is a legend connected with the change in the colour of the water of this spring which is often observed by a large number of devotees who are either closely associated with the shrine of the goddess or those who very often visit the Trtha. It is generally believed that the colour of the spring water changes in case some political, social, religious, economic and cultural upheavals take place or are expected to happen in the valley in the near future. There is a reference to a conversation in the *Bringesh Samhita*, between the Bhairavi and the Bhairava regarding change in the colour of water of the spring from time to time especially on the Jayanti day, i.e.(Jeshta Shokla Ashtami). The Bhairava says, "O! Auspicious Bhairavi, in this way I have made you to know how Goddess Rajnya appeared in a cosmic form in a spring with changing colour at Tulamula, where the treasures of all denominations shall be open to all devotees who listen to or recite these hymns [1]." This is the only holy spring in the world where the colour of its water keeps on changing miraculously. It is ascribed to the manifestation of the Goddess Maha Maya which serves as an advance signal of the coming events closely connected with the valley and its people. The light green, milky, light pink colours of the spring water are suggestive of the auspicious events that are supposed to take place during the near future whereas black, and dark red/green/pink colours are indicative of something bad and the people of the valley take all these omens seriously.

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[1] The etymology of the word 'Booni' appears to be pre-historic as this magnificent tree was mostly planted by our ancestors very close to the temples and shrines and the word appears a synonym of Bhawani, (one of the most common names of Mother Goddess Parvati in Kashmir). The nomenclature, 'Chinar' is a Persian word and appears a latter version when the Persian speaking people reached the valley, but the existence of this tree is referred to in the Nilamata Purana our chronicles, and other religious scriptures much ahead of that period.

Jagat Guru Shankaracharya, attained final realization at the feet of the Mother Goddess at Tulamula and composed the famous Stutis (prayers) in Her praise called, *Saundariya Lahari*, containing inner thoughts of the scholar after he had attained the Final Bliss at the feet of the Mother. Besides him, some of the famous scholars of modern India have stayed here and attained their spiritual elevation at the sacred feet of the Mother. Swami Vivekananda is said to have experienced Devi Sakshatkar during his stay here. To seek the Grace of the Goddess, Swami Vivekananda and Jagat Guru Shankaracharya, both have advocated complete surrender before the Devi, treating such an act more effective than offering prayers, Mantras, Tantras, Stotras and highly talked of Tapa, and Tyaga for Moksha through long and tedious penance.

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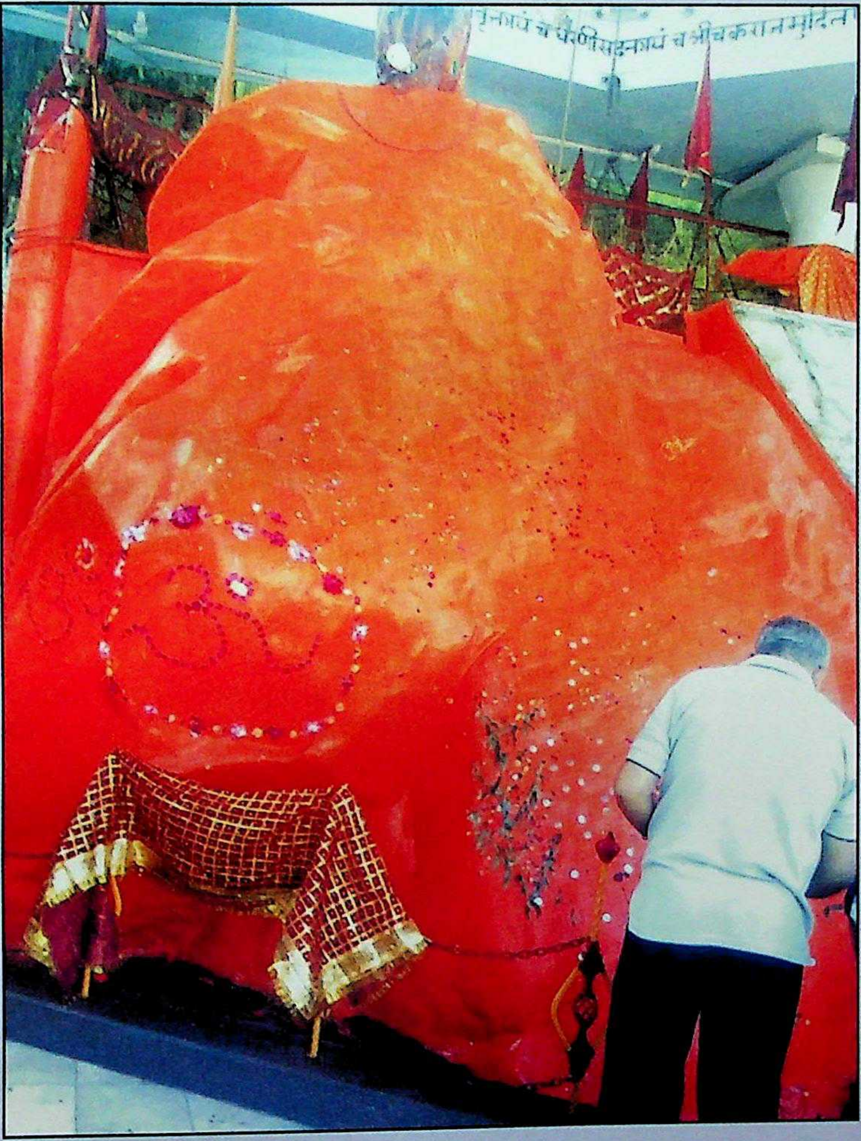
[1] Bringesh Samhita, Canto II., v., 72.

The whole area of Tulamula is encircled by a number of small water streams, called Gang Khi, formed due to the seeping water from Nalah Sindha that originates from Amravati which is further fed by five streamlets of Panchatarni. It is joined at Baltal by a tributary from the famous spring Sheshnag, also called Shishramnag (lake), in Kashmiri, and it approaches towards the west from the high mountains of Swami Amar Nath Ji. Its confluence with the Vitasta takes place at Do'darhama, named as Dugdashyama in the chronicle of Kalhana, and it is just close to Tulamula. It appears that all the water streams travel all these distances and assemble here to wash the lotus feet of Mother Goddess. A number of small islands encircled by water-streams called, "Gang Khi" decorate the environment of the holy shrine encircled by the lofty Chinars and a cluster of willow trees making the whole area a dream land at the holy feet of the Mother. Before entering the main temple of the goddess, the devotees take a bath in the main Nalah where bathing Ghats have been constructed for the devotees by Dharmarth Trust that looks after the shrine since Independence. The Jal Kund is provided with a beautiful Parikrama and most of the devotees remain busy in circumambulating the holy spring. On all mornings and evenings the devotees hold a collective 'Aarti' and make offerings of milk and sugar candy, (Qand) to the Devi during the 'Pooja'. It must be added that the process of making offerings to the Devi continues for the whole day on all the Shokla Ashtamis.

Due to the militancy in the valley and after migration of the Kashmiri Pandits, the replicas of many of the shrines of the Mother Goddess that were spread over the length and breadth of the valley (as described above) have been constructed at a number of places in India and even abroad. This also includes the replica of the tirtha of Tulamula that the devotees have constructed at Janipura, Jammu. People who are unable to present themselves at the Tulamula shrine in Kashmir on the Jayanti day of the Mother due to obvious reasons; pay their obeisance here at Jammu on all the auspicious days. It may be added that arrangements for the safe visit of the pilgrims to the abode of Mata Rajnya at Tulamula is made by the State Government every year on this auspicious days under a tight security.



Sharika Peetha at
CHAKRESHVARA, Srinagar.

iv. CHAKRESHVRA

Shakti Peetha of Mata Sharika on Hari Parbat

According to the *Nilmat Purana*, the land of Kashmir was a big lake called Satisara, six yojanas [1] long and three yojanas wide for six Manvantaras since the beginning of the present Kalpa [2]. At the beginning of the seventh Manvantara, and due to the strenuous efforts of Kashyapa, the water of the lake was drained out through an outlet made with the plough by Ananta. Lord Vishnu, who along with other gods and goddesses, arrived at the mountain peak close to the said Sara, to witness the killing of the demon Jalodbhava. The demon had got a boon from Brahma of being invincible in the waters of Satisara. Though all the water of the lake was drained out but still water existed in a few low-lying places near the present city of Srinagari which was still immersed in water. In the *Sharika Mahatmya* the legend says that the Divine Mother, Durga, in the from of a magpie (Ha'r) flew to the Sumeru mountain peak and brought a stone from there and placed it on the gate of the underworld, [3] and thus closed the gate for the retreat of the demons to the nether worlds for all times. Goddess Durga made a permanent abode of her choice to the north-western of the hillock, named as Hari Parbat, as is described in the *Sharika Mahatmya*.

Pravarsena II (6th century) after his return from various expeditions, desired to build a city of his choice in the vicinity of this area so that the new capital could save his people from the permanent threat of the floods that devastated the whole of the old city every year. Till then he lived at "Puranadhisthan" (Pa'ndrenthan), the city that was built by his grand father, Pravarsena I. Here Kalhana has quoted a legend. He mentions that the king set out for locating the place of his choice and a demon Atta led him to the place that was a demarcation line between the territory of the demon and the goddess Sharika. [1] It was in the vicinity of Hari Parbat hillock where a major part of Pravarapura was originally built by the king. Jonraja says that the city of Shri, (the name it attained for its lofty buildings), was built just beneath the Sharika Shila like the city of Alka, the heavenly abode of Kubera, under the shade of the Sumeru mountain. It is also known as Chakreshvara, Sharika Peetha, Hari Parbat, Pradhyuman Peetha and Devi Aangan even today. [2] The shrine of Vinayaka Bhimaswamin, a Svayambhu image of Ganesha existed to the south-east of Hari Parbat hill during the reign of Pravarsena II. [3] In the *Nilamata Purana* there is a conversation between Gonanda and Brihadashva wherein the latter confirms the importance of the abode of Mother Goddess at Chakreshvara [4]

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[1] A measure of distance considered equal to four, five, nine or eighteen miles.
P.S .*Sanskrit-English Dictionary by Monier Williams.*

[2] *Aaseeth sarah purna jalam suramyam sumanoharam II*
Kalpaarambhaprabhriti yat puraa Manvantarani shat I
Asminmanvantaray jaatam vishyam sumanoharam II
Nialmata Pu., vs. 12 (b),13.

[3] The demons are considered to be residents of the nether worlds. The outlet from where the water of the lake was oozing, was considered as the gate of the demon to enter into the Satisara and its surroundings. The legend goes that the goddess in the form of a Sharika (Ha'r in Kashmiri language), while closing the gate of the demon by placing a stone on it, killed the demon Jalodbhava who was crushed under it, contains the *Sharika Mahatmya*.

If we look from a distance at the temple of Chakreshvara, it appears just like a fortress constructed to guard the main fort built on the top of the hill during the Mughal rule in the reign of Akbar. Maharaja Ghulab Singh took up the construction of the temple at Hari Parbat after he conquered the valley of Kashmir during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab. The Chakreshvara Shila is not a sculptured one but a semi round rock with a number of natural cuts on the upper portion on both its sides looking form a short distance the feather tips of a standing bird. The old temple built by the Maharaja at

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[1] Kalhana, *Raajatarangini*,Tr. by M.A. Stein, Re. P.1979, Vol. I, Chap.V, P.84.

[2] *Namna Lakshmya Mahishyah sa prasiddhaam nagrim vyadhaat I*
Shaarika shailaraajasya moolye punyajanaashritaam I
Yamadraakshyareettaram lokah Sumeror Alkaamiva II
Rajatarangini by Jonraja, Ed. Dr Raghunath Singh, 1972, v. 410

[3] *History of Kashmir*, by P.N. K. Bamzai 2nd , Edition 1973, P., 198.

[4] *Chakreshvaram sa Jyeshthesham Balakhileshvaram Harim I*
Keshivesham Samesham cha Dhaumesham Varuneshvaram II
Chakreshvaram sa Chandresham Kashyapesham Vilohitam II
Kamesham sa Vasishthesham Bhutesham sa Gneshvaram II
Nilamata Pu. vv. 1060-61.

Sharika Peetha and the placement of the Svayambhu Sharika Shila with a natural sketch of Matri Charka / Shri Chakra on it, confirm the artistic taste of the king. The recently constructed temple of the deity at Hari Parbat, gives a viewed picture of the Devi that clearly shows the beak of the magpie (Sharika) on the front portion of the said Shila in a sitting posture. There also exists an old temple of the deity inside the fort on the top of the hillock built by the Dogra rulers of the State.

The images of Sharika on the hillock and that of the Ganesha or the Vinayaka Bhimaswamin temple at the southern foothill are both Svayambu (self made) rock idols and both have been under a thick cover of vermilion paste since ancient times. The image of Shri Sharika can clearly be seen when looked at more closely and minutely. The outer sketch of the Sharika (bird image) can be visualized very easily after examining the Shila but the lines of Shri Chakra also known as "Matri Chakra" [1] said to be on the main Shri Shila are buried deep under the vermilion paste and to locate them is not so easy. Mother worship or Shakti worship plays a great part in the Tantra rituals of the Shaiva Darshan of Kashmir. The Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha has defined 'Matrika', as one of the thirty six (36) 'Yoginis', that help the devotee to attain the 'Shambhava Upayana'- a state of Self Realization through ones own self. [2] Abhinava Gupta, (A.D.,c.950-1050) a famous Shaiva philosopher of Kashmir, has defined 'Matrika' as the means to understand the very deep meaning of Para Shakti, present in every individual in the form of Matrika Shakti. Famous Shaiva Scholar Baljinath Pandit is of the opinion that Matrika is the Mother of all Tantras and Mantras as defined in the Netra Tantra of the Agma Shastra, a branch of the Shaiva Shastra in which Shiva reveals to Parvati the fundamental philosophy of His third eye. [3] The Kashmir *Shasiva Darshan Brihad Kosh*, has at the same time defined Matrika as the independent Kriya

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[1] *Pradhyuman Shikhraaseenam Matrichakropashobhitam I,*
Peetheshorim Shilaarupam Shaarikaam Pranamyamiham II
Gnesha – Durga Stotravali by Pt Keshov Bhatt, Bombay 1925, PP. 65-66.

[2] *Shaambhavopaayopayogini .... Tadupaayitah Shiva yogi svaatmaanam svavilaasata eva pratibimbit shattrimshattatvam, ...*
Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha Pt II, year 2005, pp. 519,671.

[3] *Matrikaam pashoonaam aajyaanaam vishva maataram sarva mantra tantra jananeem I*
Swatantriya Darpanam, by B.N. Pandit, p. 26.

Shakti of Shiva manifested in the form of Matrika. [1] The Netra Tantra says that when due to very long practice, the Kriya Shakti loses its independent form as a result of change in its eight syllables, it attains the Cosmic Form. The eight forms of syllables present in it attain the form of Dhwani – the Ultimate Sound. It assumes the form of Matrika for it is possessed of the force of action, 'Kriya Shakti'. This Ultimate 'Shakti' takes the Ultimate name and the Forceful Eloquence, i.e., 'Om' or 'Maheshwari'. [2]

The word Matri or Matrika Poojan is deeply associated with almost all the Sanskaras of Kashmiri Pandits. It appears that the Chakras and other diagrams that we make at the time of putting up the Kalsha for various ritualistic praxis, have some connection with the Matrikas as we adore "*Matri Mandala Yajyadivatabyah*" on all such occasions whether it is laying the foundation stone for the construction of our houses or on the eve of Jatakarna/Namakarna or on the Divagone ceremony of our children on the eve of Yagnyopavita or marriage. There are a host of many other ritualistic practices like the Yajnyas or Hawanas where our priests lay such sketches at the Yajnya site. [3] Not only this, the common word for a "lady" in the Kashmiri language is "Matrika" and we make the use of this word for a lady on all social gatherings. Kalhana has made mention of Matri Charkas at a number of places in his *Rajatarangini* and at each place it is associated with one temple of repute or the other. [4] In v.333 of the chronicle the writer has used the word "Devi Chakra" as an equivalent but the usage of the word seems traditional. It appears that, in the past, mystical diagrams may have been carved in stone like the Shri Chakra and Rajnya Chakra which the people of Kashmir worship to this day in accordance with the directions laid down in the Tantra Shastra. The Shri Chakras (Svayambhu) on the natural Shila at Hari Parbat and at the Khrew hillock of Jwala ji, venerated by the devotees on special occasions, are considered as manifestations of the Supreme Force that have appeared naturally. The *Sharika Mahatmya* confirms that the goddess is seated on the top of the Pradhyuman Hill as Peetheshvori, Shila Roopa Sharika decorated with the Matri Chakra and it is confirmed by the devotees that the contours of the Shri Chakra automatically become visible on some special occasions and religious congregations.

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[1] *Shivasya svantantraa kriyashaktireva Maatricaa roopataya prakaashite I*
Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha Pt II, year 2005, P. 519
Shabdaraashair Bhairvasya yanut shunatayaantari I
Saa Maateva bhavishattvaatenaasau matrikodita II
Abhinavagupta,*Tantraloka* ,15, 130-31.

[2] *Yadaa swarantraaluphtaa saa kriya kaaranarupinee I*
Varnaroopaashtabhedena sphotadidhwani roopinee II
Maatricaa saa vinirdishtaa kriyashakhtir Maheshwaree I
Kriyaakhya paramaa saa tu sarva vaangmaya roopinee II
Netra Tantra (Kmr Granthmala) No 21,37-39.

[3] P. S. *Ved Kapladrumah*, by Keshov Bhatt, Bombay, 1921, Pt. I. P. 136, and Pt. II., PP. 116-19. The narration includes the names of the Mother Goddess in various forms recited/worshipped at the moment.

[4] Kalhana *Rajatarangini*, Trans. By M.A. Stein, Re. P. 1979, Vol. I, vv. Book, i.122, 335,348, Book, iii., 99, v., 55, 333.

Especially for the people of Kashmir, full fortnight of Chaitra Shukla is dedicated to the worship of various deities, like Durga Poojan on the first of Navaratra,(Navareh) - the New Year's Day, Zanga' Tray – a day of outing for the married ladies of Kashmiri Hindus to visit their parental houses, Durga Ashtami, Ram Navmi and Mahavira Jayanti. During all these days of celebrations, the Parbat area, as Hari Parbat is locally called which also includes the Devi Angan and the Badam Wari area as well – is a vast stretch of land that was covered with almond trees which used to buzz with the Hindu populace that visited the Badam Wari and other tirthas in its vicinity on all such days. No doubt there is no precedence or any binding in our scriptures to visit the Chakreshvara temple during the Nava Durga Pooja days, though the Nilamata Purana in its vv. 668–670, has clearly directed to venerate Mother Goddess Shri/ Lakshmi on the fifth day of Chaitra Shukla, called Shri Panchami .[1]

Sharika Jayanti is celebrated on the ninth day of the bright fortnight of Ashada. A large congregation of the devotees takes place on this date at the Sharika Peetha. Till recently, the people visited the holy shrine on this particular date, and they were allowed to visit the sanctum sanatoriums at the Sharika Peetha and the fort temple of the deity, (which is on the top of the hill). The devotees pay their reverence to the goddess on all other routine days of their daily visit from the first entry right through an arch-gate at the beginning of the stairway at *Devi Aangan*. The *Sharika Mahatmya* clearly says that this whole area was named as *Pradhyuman Peetha* in the ancient annals of Kashmir. [1] The *Chakreshvara* sanctum sanctorum of the *Devi* was considered as the *Darbar* of the *Devi* and the general public was not allowed to interfere in the working of the *Darbar* by their daily obeisance except when there were special guests and invitees. The arch on the gate is inscribed with a prayer for the protection, betterment and prosperity of the whole world for *Shri Durga* or *Lakshmi* assumed the form of *Sharika* only to protect all the peace-loving people of the world, a belief held more vigorously by the Hindu population of Kashmir even to this date. [2]

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[1] *Chaitra Maase site pakshye panchamyam dvijisattam I,*
Shriyacha Pujanam Kaaryam Prokhtaa Shri Panchmi tu saa II.
Nilmata Purana v. 6`68.

Shri Sharika Devi is also named as *Ashta Dasha Bhuja* – a deity having eighteen arms as She possesses the powers of all the main nine incarnations (*Sarupas)* of the Divine Mother in the form of, *Durga, Sarasvati, Jwala, Sharada, Rajnya, Sharika, Lakshmi, Bhadrakali, Shiva,* or *Tripura* and others as described in the *Mahatmya.* [3] The killer of the *Asuras,* the incarnation of *Mata Sharika* is considered to be the terrifying aspect of the Mother called "*Ugra Roopa*". In order to pay reverence to the Mother Goddess, the devotees in the past used to take yellow cooked rice with cooked liver of a goat/sheep as a sacrificial offering for the Devi on the Jayanti and almost on all Tuesdays and Saturdays. Even raw meat preferably the lungs including the heart of a goat/sheep was offered to the kites on all these days as an oblation as per the directive contained in the Ganesha – Sharika Sahasranama. [1] But on coming closer to the Vaishnava cult which is more prominent in the rest of the subcontinent, this sacrificial practice has been stopped and pure vegetarian offerings are made to the deity on all such days now.

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[1] The arch has the following couplet as derived from the *Devi (Durga) Dhyan Ratnamala:-*
Kashmeera Pravareshamadhyanagaee Pradhyumna peethe stithaa I
Deveesaftakasamyutaa Bhagavatee Shri Shaarikaa patunah II.
Gnesha – Durga Stotravali by Pt Keshov Bhatt, Bombay 1925, p. 64.

[2] *Yaa Shri swayam sukritinaam bhuvaneshva Lakshmih,*
Paapaathmanaam krita dhiya hirdayeshu buddhih I
Shraddhaa sataam kulajana prabhvasya lajjaa ,
Taam tvaam natah sma paripaalaya Devi vishavam II,
Ibid, s..41 , p.67.

[3] *Durgaam tvaam cha Sarasvateem, Jwalaamukheem, Shaaradaam, Rajneem*
Shaarikayaa yutaamaghahareem tvaam Bhadrakaaleem Shivaam, I
Vaageesheem, Tripuraam bhajaami samayam Peetheshvareem Siddhidaam I
.Gaayatreem Kamlaasanasya vanitaam Shri Kubjikaam Kaalikaam II
Ibid, v. 80, P.70-71.

After paying obeisance to the Devi from the Devi Angan premises, now forming a small cluster of a few houses of Kashmiri Brahmins who lived till recently at the foot of the Sharika Peetha, the devotees start circumambulating the outer Parikramaa of the Hari Parbat hillock, which as a matter of fact begins from Shri Mahaganesha temple form where the most of the devotees of the Mother enter the gate of the main fort. The gate at the outer wall of the main fort, known as Sangeen Darwaza, is close to the interior city called Mohalla Nowhatta which is densely populated. [2] The Maha Ganesha temple situated to the South of the hillock is a Svayambhu rock, also named as Bhima Swamin Ganesha, is just close to this gate. Kalhana narrates a legend while describing the beauty of the city established by Pravarsena II. The story goes that the idol of Bhima Swamin Ganesha was, as usual, facing west. He turned his face to the east so as to appreciate and keep permanently the newly laid beautiful city of Shrinagri laid by king Pravarsena, under his vigil. [1] Dr Raghunath Singh while giving his comments on verse 766 of the *Rajatarangini* of Jonraja has a different story to tell about the un-natural changed state of the idol of Ghesha at this temple. He quotes that according to the Bombay manuscript of *Jona-Rajatarangini*, the deity, having been disturbed with the policy of destruction of the temples by Sultan Skinder Butshikan, Bhima Swami Ganesha turned his face from west to east for the city that had so beautifully been constructed by the earlier rulers was so callously destroyed by the Sultan. Thus the present rock is the back of the actual idol with the result that the impression of the elephant's trunk of Ganesha is not visible on the idol. [2]

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[1] *Bhaume Shanidine vaapi Chakramadhye pathet yadi I,*
Sadhyah tasya Maheshaani Sharikaa vardaa bhavet II,
Chatushpathe patheth yastu tri raatram raatrivrittaye I
Dattvaa balim suraam kshoudram samatsya maamsa bhaktakam II
Gnesha, Rajnya, Jwala, Sharika Sahasranama by Pt Keshav Bhatt, P.189.

[2] Besides a number of small outlets made by some miscreants, the ground wall of the main fort has three approach gates from proper Srinagar city /Rainawari- Dalgate, Nowhatta and the Hawal sides. The first gate is on the Western-most (Hawal), side of the old city, known as Bachhi Darwaza and it is more close to the *Chkareshwara* temple though there does hardly now exist any Hindu population to that side of the old city. Previously the royal families and the palaces of kings existed in this portion of the city and those people generally used this gate as a direct approach to the main fort. It appears that the "Badshahi Darwaza", latter became as Bachhi Darwaza in the modern Kashmiri language. The approach road to this gate now caters to the needs of the people settled in the erstwhile Badamwari area of this beautiful resort. The other main gate is known as the Sangeen Darwaza on the South-western, (Nowhatta) side and it is more close to the Hindu /Muslim population of the interior city. The temple of Shri Ganesha and the Ziyarats of Makhdoom Sahib and Mulla Baha-ud-Din Sahib are just close to this gate. The third gate is to the south of the hillock and is known as Kathi Darwaza. The famous Sikh Shrine of Guru Hargovind Singh Ji, (Chatti Padshahi) is just close to this gate. This gate caters to the needs of the devotees coming from Rainawari/ Dal Gate areas of the city.

The devotees generally enter the fort from the Sangeen Darwaza and pay their first obeisance at the temple of Maha Ganesha. Next the devotees reach to the temple of goddess at Chakreshvara. In order to complete the Parikrama of the Goddess extending over a distance of more than 5 Km, the devotees circumambulate the hillock walking over a pathway meant for the purpose and proceed towards Amarchand Koul's temple situated at the extreme northern end of the hillock. [3] Turning right towards the east of the hillock the devotees reach the abode of Mata Rajnya situated to the left of the road and known commonly as Po'khri'bal. Here a small temple of Rajnya is situated in the midst of a small pond, called "Pokhar" in Sanskrit and "Po'kha'r" in Kashmiri languages, hence "Po'khari'bal." It is one of the most venerated spots of Mata Rajnya situated to the east of the Sharika Hill and on the left side of the Parikrama path. The devotees visit this shrine on every Saturday evening and sing devotional songs in praise of the goddess for the whole night. On the eighth day of the dark half of the month of Phalguna, commonly called "Huri' Aa'tham" or Hora Ashtami, a large congregation is held here and a good number of devotees visit this place. It may be mentioned here that "Hora" is a Sanskrit word and means 'time' or 'Hour'. Mata Rajnya stays here in a state of peace and pancakes, puddings and sweets are offered to the goddess and the devotees take the left over as oblations to their homes. A big Havan is held in honour of the goddess and Bhajan Mandalis sing devotional songs for the whole night on the said day. To the right of the pathway is an old pit, known as Waris Khanun Chah. It appears to have been got dug by some Kabul Chieftain, Waris Khan, for the confinement of unwanted criminals of the society during the Afgan rule in Kashmir. The present government has used the barracks constructed by the erstwhile rulers of the State and these have provided accommodation to the Srinagar Central Jail, Mental Hospital, Animal Husbandry departments etc., though with some modifications in the buildings. All these are to the left side of the Parikrama road. Next the devotees reach Kathi Darwaza, also known as 'Chatti Padshahi.', a Gurudwara in memory of the Sixth Guru, Guru Hargovind Singh Ji Sahib of the Khalasa Panth. The pilgrims coming from Rainawari or Dalgate retreat to their homes from this very gate. The devotees coming from the interior city take to the inner road that leads to the Gnesha temple close to the Sangeen Darwaza for returning to their homes.

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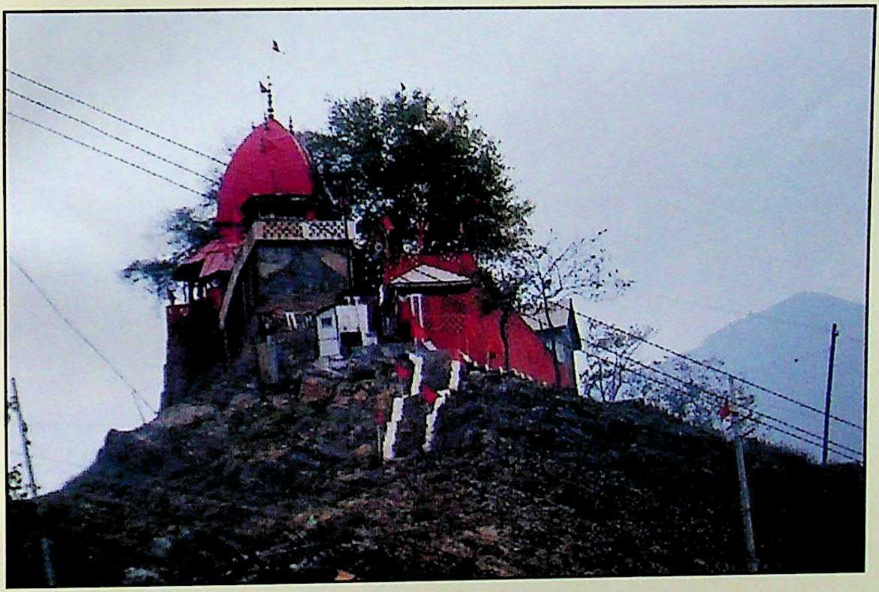
[1] *Rajatarangini*, Translated by M.A. Stein, Reprint, 1979, Vol. I, iii. Book, v. p.,352.

[2] *Rajatarangini* by Jonraja, Ed. Dr Raghunath Singh, 1972, p. 259, f.n. v. 410.

[3] He is said to be a businessman from the Zaina Kadal area of the city who got constructed this Vishnu temple during the Dogra rule and installed black marble idols of Vishnu and Lakshmi in it. During the Hindu-Muslim riots in early thirties of the twentieth century, the idols were stolen from the temple even though it was looked after by the Dharmarth Trust, run under the supervision of the then State of Jammu and Kashmir. Latter the idols of Ram and Sita were installed in the temple and thence it was also named as Rama Koulun Mandir –' the temple of Rama Koul'.



Jwala Peetha at Khrew, Kashmir

v. Jwala Devi

Abode of Jwala Chakra at Khrew

Khrew is at a distance of 5 km. from the village Kho'nmuh, the famous cave resort of Shiva, known as Ha'ri'sho'r and also the birthplace of Bilhana, the famous Sanskrit scholar and the Shaiva luminary of Kashmir. It is at a distance of 9 km. to north-east of the famous township of Pampore, the land of saffron and the place wherefrom Lalleshwari or Lal Ded, the 14th century Shaivite saint poetess of Kashmir, explained the Kashmir Shiava philosophy and Darshana to the common masses of the valley in their own mother tongue in the form of Vakhs and this form of early Kashmiri Poetry remains unparalleled till date. This whole area of Khrew-Shar comes under the Vihi Pargana and commands a central position in the whole valley since early times. It is the most fertile area of the State and is considered socially, economically and politically as a promising locality of the State of Jammu and Kashmir since ancient times.

Previously the whole valley was divided into three main parts, namely Maraz (Madav Rajya) – the southern part of the valley from the lofty Pir Panchal range up to the southern boundary of the old city called, Puranadhishthan. The city enjoyed the central position and was named as Yamraz. The northern area of the valley that included the area of Jhelum across the Tosamaidan Peeks came under Kamraz (Karma Rajya). Kalhanna, while giving the details of the expeditions of king Susla (1112 - 20 A.D.) makes a reference to a village named Khaduvi – a stronghold of the Damaras in the Vihi Pargana. This name corroborates with the present name of Khrew.[1] Acharya Kshemendra in his book, Lokaprakasha, while listing villages of various Parganas of the valley, mentions the name of Khaduviya in the Pargana of Vishaya.[2] This name of the village also corroborates with the description of the village Khrew, though with slight phonological modifications in the name of the village and Pargana, as given by Kalhanna in *Rajatarangini*. Such phonetic differences in spoken Kashmiri language are evident even to-day between different sects and distinct areas of the valley.

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[1] Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*, Translated by M.A. Stein, Reprint, 1979, Vol. II., Book viii, v., 733.

[2] *Lokaprakasha*, by Aacharya Kshemendra, -IV.

As assessed by geologists from time to time, the whole area falls under the live volcanic hilly area stretching from the Zabarvana and the famous Shankaracharya hillocks up to the Jwala Devi hillock at Khrew and beyond to the east of Shar village in the Vihi Pargana of this central part of the valley. According to geologists, apparently the volcanic activity in the area has been dormant since long but the sulfur spring at the foot of the Jwala Mukhi hillock in the Vuyan village which is adjacent to the Jwala hill, is a sufficient proof of the range being live even today. Geologists are of the opinion that the huge store of under-ground water in the vicinity of this area has kept this range somewhat inactive till date.

There is an abundance of springs close to the Jwala Devi hillock in the vicinity of Khrew village and its surroundings since ancient times. On my last visit to this famous pilgrimage center of southern Kashmir, an elderly person from Khonmuh, a nearby village of Khrew, Lasa Kak Razdan, who is a devotee of Jwala Devi and visits Her shrine regularly, narrated a legend connected with the abundance of springs found in the vicinity of the Tirtha. The legend contains that the whole area was dry and Kandi-like during ancient times and water was very scarce in the whole area. A saintly person known as Vishna Ram, who led the life of a hermit, was very fond of cleaning his hands with a lot of brown clay and water repeatedly in order to keep his hands clean, chaste and pure, as is generally the practice among Kashmiri Pandits even today. For this purpose he would require a plenty of water every now and then. His family members were fed up with his practice and he was thus nicknamed as "Mye'tsi Ve'shin" by his family members. Disgusted by the misbehavior of his family and society, he left his home and taking a high mountain route, he reached Tarsar, a big source of water just to the east of Mahadeva Mountain. He thought it to be the famous Ganga, a great source of water coming down from the locks of Hara. He stopped at the bank of this lake and meditated for a considerable time. At last Mother Ganga was pleased with the devotee and told him to ask for a boon. The simple man requested her to accompany him up to his village. Ganga agreed to follow him provided he would not see backwards anywhere at any cost on his return journey to his home and it was further agreed that if he broke his promise; she would retreat to her earlier abode. Vishna Ram agreed. He was proceeding ahead towards his hometown and Ganga ji followed him as promised. He was just a few hundred yards away from his village; when Narada (the messenger of gods) came to mislead him. He, in the guise of a young man asked Mr. Vishna, "Oh! Old Brahman, why are you in such a haste?" Vishna replied, "Look gentleman, I am in haste as I have to lead Ganga to my native village." The young man laughed and said, "Which Ganga? Where is it?" "You blind man, don't you see that She is following me?," said the old man. The young man said again, "There is no body following you. Some body has made a fool of you". Perplexed, the old man looked behind, there was actually no one following him nor was the young man, who had befooled him, present there. From this point the old man again retreated to his place of penance and started praying Ganga ji more vigorously. After the passage of considerable time Ganga ji was pleased with his devotion and addressed him thus, "O! My child, you are a simpleton. You cannot lead me to your village. Take this bag of flowers and put a few of them at the places of your choice where you want my presence." The saintly person took the bag of flowers from Mother Ganga and retreated to his native village. On reaching his village he put a few flowers from his bag at a few selected places of his choice and springs gushed forth at these places. The news of the springs flashed like a wild fire. Every one wanted to have water lets in his courtyard and thus they approached the old man and got the flowers and springs gushed forth everywhere in and around the area. It is because of this very fact that Abul Fazal has mentioned them as objects of worship and has estimated their number as 360.[1] From this date onwards Vishna Ram made his permanent abode at the sacred feet of Jwala Ji on the top of the hillock.

Close to the village Khrew, on the top of the hillock to the north-west of the main village, is a sacred Svayambhu Chakra or a mystical diagram on a rock known as Jwala Mukhi–with Durga/Jwala Chakra, and the Hindus of the valley often visit this sacred place especially on the bright fourteenth day of Ashada known as Jwala Chaturdashi or Hara' Tso'dah since ancient times. M.A. Stein has confirmed while editing the *Rajatarangini* of Kalhana that attendance of Kashmiri Pandits at the Jwala temple was considerable on the specific date when he visited the area during his survey. [1] Jonraja in his *Rajatarangini* has also given a reference about the Damaras of the village of Khrew [2]

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[1] *Adin-i-Akabri*, II, P. 358.

The Dharmarth Trust, Jammu and Kashmir has published a small pamphlet of four pages under the title, "*Salutations to Shakti Saroopa - Jwala Ji - A Bird's Eye-View of Shree Jwala Ji.*" on 28th July, 1988, printed at Brocas' Press, Srinagar. The pamphlet starts with two couplets from the Devi Panchak, a mention of which is contained in the following notes. The pamphlet has a different story regarding the consecration of the temple of Jwala Ji on the main hillock. The story goes that the establishment of the Temple has the Pauranic background. Without quoting any specific reference from any of the *Puranas*, it narrates that Rakshsas wanted to snatch the treasure of gods stored at Alka Puri and guarded by Kubera. They conspired to invade Alka Puri. The Naga King somehow came to know about this secret invasion and he informed gods about it. In order to save themselves from the invasion of Asuras, gods approached Mother Goddess Parvati, who took the furious form of Jwala and annihilated all Asuras and restored peace in the realm of gods. After restoring normalcy the goddess went round the whole valley to see for Herself the condition of Her devotees. In this way Mother Goddess reached the hermitage of one of Her devotees (*Vishna Ram*) on the top of the Khrew hillock. She was pleased with the devotion of the old Brahman and told him to ask for a boon. The Brahman desired for the eternal presence of the Goddess in his hermitage. The Goddess had no alternative but to accede to the prayer of the hermit and in this way the abode of Shakti Saroopa Jwala Ji was established on the top of the Khrew hillock.

The village of Khrew is situated at a distance of 20 km. from Srinagar and falls in the Vihi Pargana of ancient Kashmir. Till recently the village was a neglected one but due to the establishment of the Government Cement Factory in the vicinity of the village, the area has emerged on the Industrial Map of the valley. The temple on the top of the hillock was first constructed by one Dr. Bal Krishen Koul, one of the devotees of the Mother and the elder brother of Rai Bahadur, Pandit Hari Krishen Koul, the Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir State during the reign of Maharaja Pratap Singh, some time during the second half of the nineteenth century.[1] With the financial help from Dharmarth Trust, established by the erstwhile Dogra rulers of the State for the maintenance of the temple estates in the State and with the help of the local Hindu populace, the present temple of Jawala Devi at the top of the hillock and a flight of stairs of Devri stones, have been constructed during early forties of the twentieth century. The stone stair is constructed from the base of the hill up to the temple on the hill top and the renovation of the bathing Ghats at the main spring at the foot of the hill was also got completed during the said period using Devri stones locally available at Laduva and Shar areas. Now the governing body of the temple elected by the Hindu populace of Khrew area has taken up the annual repairs and maintenance of the temple on a regular basis.

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[1] Kalahana, *Rajatarangini*, ed. By M.A. Stein, Pt.II., p. 459.

[2] *Rajatarangini* by Jonraja, V-550 (f.n.)

The *Devi Panchak* of the *Jwala Devi Sukhta* clearly states that the Devi has the third eye "Para Shakti'. The scriptures also confirm that in order to have complete sway over all the three worlds, "Bhoo", "Bhuwah" and "Swah", she has three faces. The Devi is also encircled with the bright flames on all sides that make Her invisible to the ordinary devotees. She is situated at the Jwala Parvat at Khrew, decorated with six Jwala Chakras that shine in her hands and fulfill all the wishes of the devotees.She is worshipped by one and all.[2] In fact the Devi Bhagwat discusses Mother Goddess in various forms and at the same time it is stressed that all the names that are attributed to the Mother are in fact the names of one and the same Supreme Force called Tripura Sundari. She is named Kali and Tripura in the form of Jwala. She is considered the protector of all the seeds that germinate. In the upper heavens She is named Chandika and in the nether worlds She attains the name of Bhuvaneshori and on this earth we call Her Jaya Devi, bestowal of all fortunes [1].

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[1] The account regarding the construction of the temple of Jwala Ji has been narrated to the author by late Makhna Lal Koul (Khodbali) whose father served as a Revenue Officer of this area for a pretty long time. He was a teenager, school-going boy and often accompanied his father on various postings during his father's postings.

[2] *Om Jwalaa parvat sithitaam trinayinaam peethatrayadhishthitaam,*
Jwalaadambarabhushitaam suvadnaam nityaam adrishyam Janaih I
Shatchakraambujamadhyagaam vargadaa ambhojabhayan vibhriteem ,
Chidrupaam sakalaartha deepanakareem Jwalaamukheem naumyaham II
Keshav Bhatt, *Brihat Totra Ratnakar, Devi Panchaka, Jwala Devi Sukhtam,* 1940, p. 300.

In the main temple, on the top of the hillock, there exists a rock within the hole caused in the outer bigger rock by some volcanic action in the past. The devotees can see the inner rock, as if, peeping through the hole of the big rock covering the top of the hillock. It appears that the inner rock that peeps through the hollow of the outer rock contains the Jwala Chakra. It is bigger in size than the hole of the outer rock with the result it is held in a swinging position in the hole, perhaps because of the volcanic pressure. This fact is also confirmed by the local devotees. They are of the opinion that a roaring sound, as if emanating from a vast vacuum, can be heard from the hole when one lends one`s ear to it.

The devotees on their pilgrimage to Jwala ji stay for a while in the adjoining area close to the main road called "tsaka" under the shade of lofty Chinars and willow plantations encircling the shrine spring known as Aneek Nag. In the Nilamata Purana there is a conversation between Gonanda and Brihadashva regarding the names of those Nagas who have mainly their abode in the Kashmir valley. Brihadashva, among others, gives the names of Kheda/Khera (Khrew Nag) as the name of one of the Nagas and this nomenclature is more close to our Aneek Nag, situated at Khrew "Kheda" [2]. The place names contained in the Nilamata Purana of some of the villages that existed in that area in the remote past appear more accurate and identical with their present names even to day. These are Kheda (Khrew), Shapala, Khereesha (Khrew Shar), Lahura/Ledeera, (Laduva /Lyatapora), Pharthashva, (Ba'rus), Jayantah, (Zyavan), etc.[1]

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[1] *Namo Bhagwati Jwale Kaali Tripora Sundari I*
Sarva beeja Paalayatri Jwalaamukhe namostate II
Aakaashe Chandikaa Devee paataale Bhuvanishori I
Mratyu loke Jaya Devee paaya Tripurasundaree II
Devi Shatke Gnesh-Durga Totrawali, Durga Poojayam, Ed., by Pt. Keshav Bhatt, Bombay Ed., year 1925, P., 65.

[2] *Khedah Shapaalah Khereesho Laahuro Ledirastatha I*
Khedascha Pharthaashvah Jayantah Tausamah tatha II
Nilmata Pr. Vol. II v. 921.

After taking a dip in the spring, the devotees purchase the Pooja material from the local market close to the "tsaka" area and proceed towards the Jwala ji temple along with their other offerings. A make-shift market also is held here on the day of the pilgrimage. However, there is neither a suitable resting place for the pilgrims nor is there any Dharamshala for their safe stay and shelter to protect them from the sun and the shower on the special days of the pilgrimage. Due to the encroachment of the space meant for the "tsaka" no space of the main spring and the adjacent areas is demarcated for the bathing Ghats, etc., for ladies and gents and that creates confusion when the number of devotees on the pilgrimage day is large. These facts need to be looked into by the Yatra sponsoring agencies.

It may be added that each family among the Hindu population of the valley, besides being divided into the three main groups mentioned earlier, is also categorised under various sects/ clans owing allegiance to one or the other deity, called, Raza'. There exists a long list of such deities [2] and each family further pays obeisance to Mother Goddess in various forms like, Rajnya, Sharika, Mangala, Tripura, Durga, Jwala, so on and so forth as the main deity of their respective clans. It may not be out of place to mention here that some of the incarnations of Mother Goddess are considered as Tamsik like Shyama in Shri Lanka of Ravana while in some other forms we consider her as Satwik, like Rajnya after her arrival at Tulamula. It was this very division on the basis of the individual worship in respect of these Ishta Devis, (clan deities) that had made the Devi worship variegated at the time of the Navadurga celebrations held in the months of Chaitra and Ashvauji Shokla. This state of affairs not only affected the mode of offerings made at various places of pilgrimage to the goddess but also influenced our eating habits during the fasting days on the eve of Navaratras. But coming more close to the Vaishnava cult prominent in the subcontinent, a change is observed among the general Kashmiri Hindus favoring pure vegetarian offerings to the goddess on all such occasions but Jwala ji is still an exception.

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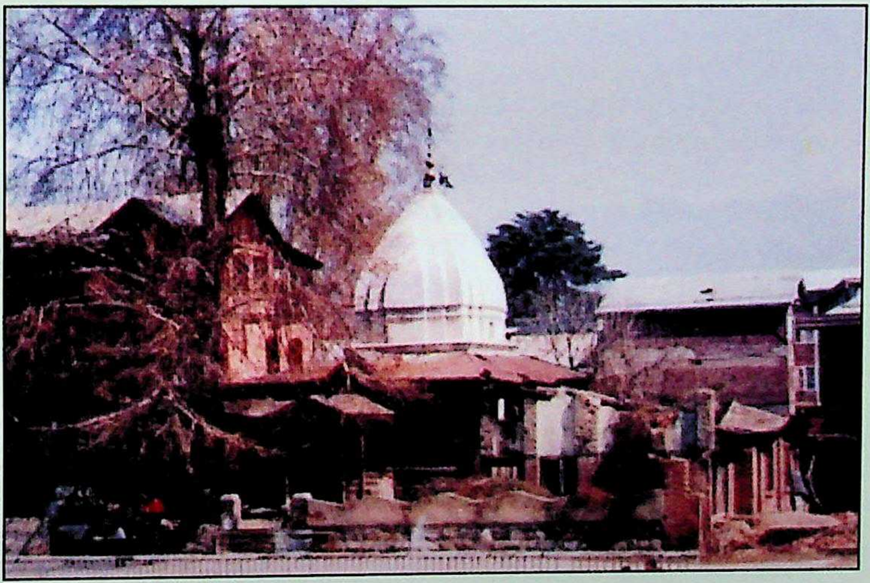
[1] For details P.S. *Kashmir Hindu Samskars (Rituals, rites and customs) – A Study*, by S.N. Pandit, pp. 320-21.

The temple is at a distance of nearly two km from the base camp and the devotees have to cover all this distance by ascending the stone staircase constructed for the purpose. The devotees also take yellow cooked rice with cooked liver of a goat or sheep as oblation for the Devi on the Jayanti day celebrated on the fourteenth day of the bright half of Ashada (Ashada Shokla Chatrudashi.) Even raw meat preferably lungs including heart of a goat/sheep are offered to the kites on this day as oblation at the hill top. Large groups of kites and crows fly around on the hillock on this occasion and children cherish this moment. After completing the Pooja, the left over yellow rice oblation is offered to all those present on the occasion and a little of it is packed for the devotees who live in their neighbourhood.

As a general practice the devotees go for a Parikrama of the deity after completing the Pooja etc. But there is hardly any space left to circumambulate the Jwala Chakra because the outer rock on which the temple is built, is too steep and extended so that the whole of the inner temple is covered by it. Besides, the western slope of the hill has a vertical steep slope and is difficult for any circumambulation. Hence the devotees take the return journey to the base of the hill from the southern end of the hillock that has very long but smooth natural rock-slabs, commonly called "Kha'ra' Paatji' "in the local language. The devotees slide on these slate-slabs gently to reach to the base of the hill on the roadside of the main town. There is a belief that by doing so a devotee is relieved from all the previous sins committed by him/her during his/her past life provided he/she abstains from committing any more in his/her future life.



The Sheetaleshwar Temple at Sheetal Nath, Srinagar

vi. SHEETALESHWAR TEMPLE

At Sheetal Nath, Srinagar

Place of Kashmiri Pandit Political Awakening

As already pointed out Pravarsena II, (6th century A.D.) found Pravarapura, a city of his choice so that he new could save his people from the perpetual threat of floods once for all. He made a detailed study of the areas presently known as Dalgate, Baba Dharam Dass, Upper Sathu, (called as Setu in the Chronicle), that also included the areas of Navapora, Khanyar, Nawhatta, etc, the present day interior areas of Srinagar city, so as to give shape to his idea. Here has quoted a legend in The *Rajatarangini* of Kalhana contains that it was in the vicinity of the area mentioned above where a major part of Pravarapura was laid by the king. [1]. Jonraja says that the city of Shri, (the name it attained for its lofty buildings), laid by Pravarsena II, in the vicinity of Sharikaa Shila (Hari Parbat) resembled the city of Alka in its magnificence. Kalhan's *Rajatarangini* also confirms in book iii, v. 352, that Maha Ganesha also called Bhima Swami Ganesha, whose shrine is found at the foothill of Hari Parbat and who usually faced west, turned His face to the east so as to appreciate the city of Pravarapura, laid by the king. [2] In this way this area has remained politically very active part of the Kashmir State since the fist millennium.

Meghavahana (early 6th century A.D.), also known as Shreshtsena, the famous adventurous king of Kashmir, had two sons, Hiranya, the elder one and Toramana, the younger one. On the death of the king, according to the tradition, Hiranya was crowned as the king of Kashmir and Toramana was declared as the Prince by the courtiers. After a short passage of time Toramana conspired against his brother and got the royal coins struck in his own name without the consent of the king. Offended, Hiranya imprisoned his brother and put him in solitary confinement. Anjana, the pregnant wife of Toramana, somehow, slipped away from the palace and while fleeing gave birth to a son at the house of a potter in the valley of Kangrah. The potter's wife nourished the child secretly in consultation with Anjana. In order to continue his grip on the throne of Kashmir, Hiranya persecuted the relatives of Toramana and compelled them either to obey the sovereign orders or to perish or fly from the valley of Kashmir to the un-known destinations. In such aimless wandering the maternal uncle of the newly born Prince, (who later ascended the throne of Kashmir as Pravarsena II), reached that very village of Kangrah valley by chance, where his sister had taken shelter. He was puzzled to see a small boy holding a mock royal court and doling out judgments while playing the role of a king. His princely manner and demeanor fascinated his maternal uncle and he was convinced of his royal background. He secretly followed him when the boy returned home in the evening. Thus the presence of his sister in the potter's house clarified all doubts and the Prince came to know about his past. From this date onwards he started taking measures to take revenge from the enemies of his father. The prince swore to develop in himself a perfect and proficient soldier so as to achieve his goal. It may be added that at the instance of some courtiers, Hiranya, released his brother Toramana from the prison but torture and long confinement had made him too feeble to survive any longer and he died soon after his release.

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[1]. *Kalhana Rajatarangini*. Book III, vv. 336 – 350.

[2] *Rajatarangini* by *Kalhana*, Book, iii. v., 352, Also pl see The *History of Kashmir*, by P.N. K. Bamzai 2nd Edition 1973, P., 198.

Hiranya died without leaving a heir to his throne and it was at the instance of Vikramaditya Harsha of Malva (Ujjain) that a Brahman poet named Matrigupta (1st quarter of the sixth century) was made the king of Kashmir. The book iii of *Rajatarangini* of Kalhana, vide verse Nos. 129-231 recounts the romantic story of the poet Matrigupta becoming the king of Kashmir in the form of a legend. The narration also confirms that the king Vikramaditya Harsha of Ujjain had a direct sway over the territory of Kashmir and could also influence the sovereignty of the State. It is because of this very fact that the predecessors of Pravarsena II of Kashmir had gifted away the royal throne of Kashmir to the king of Malva. The rule of Martigupta, though short in duration, is considered to be the best period in the history of Kashmir for its just and liberal institutions and this fact is also narrated by Mentha, a court poet of Matrigupta, in his famous composition *Higriva-vadha*.

In the mean time Vikramaditya Harsha died and his son Shiladitya (580 A.D.) ascended the throne. He, being a weak ruler, was time and again invaded by his enemies. Pravarsenna II assembled a small army of the Kangra chieftains and invaded Malva to help Shiladitya to restore his lost kingdom that had been usurped by his enemies. He also got hold of the ancestral throne of Kashmir from the enemies of Shiladitya and restored the same in his name at Sheetaleshwar Bahairava (Sheetalnath), when his coronation as the king of Kashmir took place sometime during the closing years of the sixth century. All these accounts confirm that this was a well populated area during the 4th, 5th century A.D.,

Historical documents reveal that Pravarsena II was a generous king who reinstalled the kings of the neighbouring states as a good gesture soon after he conquered them. It is also revealed that the two states of Kashmir and Malva had very deep friendly relations in the remote past so much so that the sovereignty of one State affected the other state even during the periods of adversity. It is with this background that Pravarsena II restored the throne of Malva to Shiladitya even though he knew that his father had offered the throne of Kashmir to a person of Brahmin origin, Matrigupta, on the death of his uncle Hiranya and not to him or to his father Toramana.

Honouring the deep friendship between the two states, Hiranya kept the ancestral throne that had been presented by Meghavahana, his forefather, to Vikramaditya Harsha of Malva, in a Vihara at the centre of his newly laid city, Pravarapura, near the Setu (Bund) that he had raised for the protection of his new capital from floods. He honoured the throne of his fore-fathers as a relic and re-named the Vihara as Pravaresha. It is reported to be the Vihara where the king attained spiritual powers (Siddhis) to ascend to the heaven along with his body. [1] His son, Yudhishthira raised a temple of Shiva and named it Shetaleshwar Bhairava. Though there are no archaeological remains left of the said temple or the Vihara but the name Sheetal Nath, a small segment of the present day upper Sathu, Barbar Shah area appears to be the remnant of this spot. With the passage of time what remained was a small Shivala and a stable type building (Sarai) that existed there till recent times and these were maintained by the Dharmartha Trust of the State Government during the Dogra rule. It was maintained by the local Hindu populace of the area after Independence till date. Having a central location in the city of Srinagar and mostly encircled on all sides by the Hindu population, the area became the centre of activity of the erstwhile Yuvak Sabha of Kahmiri Pandits under the leadership of S. N. Fotedar, Jai Lal Kilam, Shyam Lal Saraf and Pandit Kashyap Bandhu during the Independence Movement. It remained a central place for all social, political and religious gatherings for the Hindus of the whole valley. *The Daily Martand*, the only mouth piece of the aspirations of the microscopic Hindu minority of the valley, started its first publication on the sacred ground of Sheetalnath.

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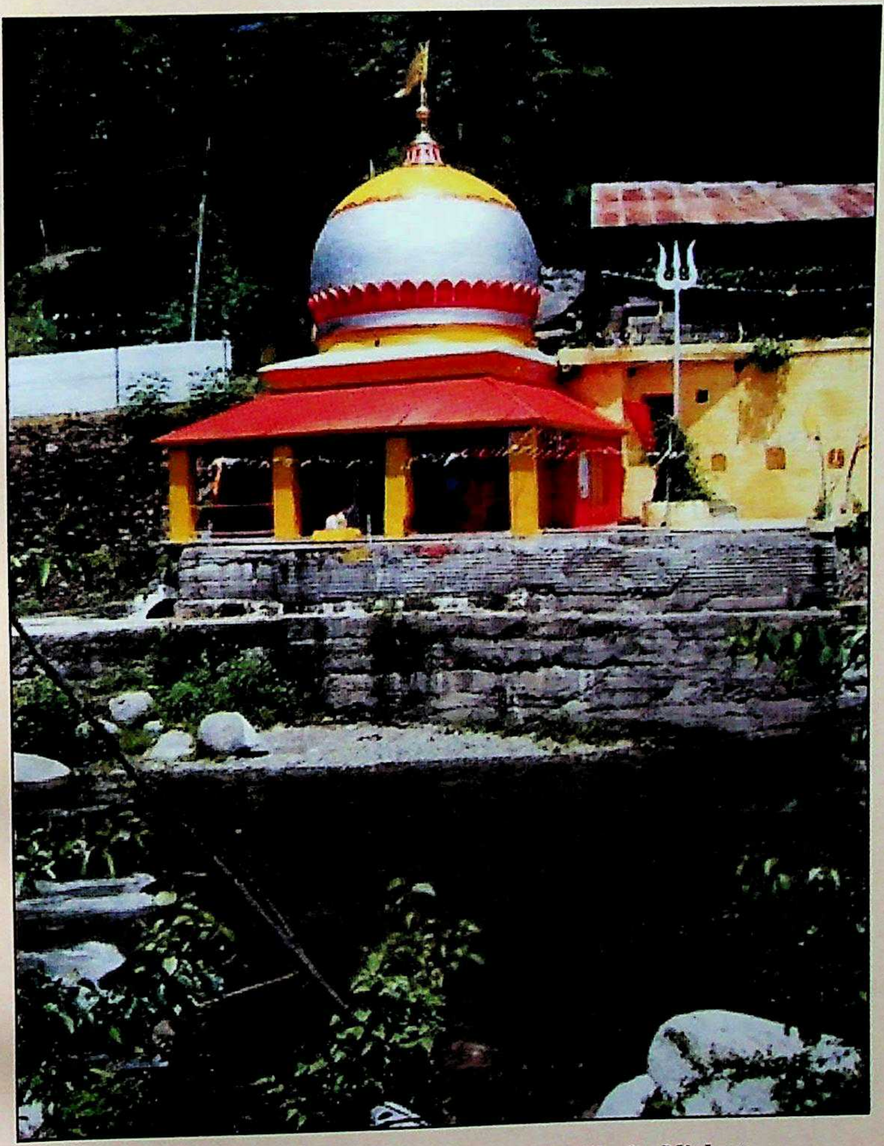
[1] *Rajatarangini by Kalhana*, Book III, v.377.



The Gupta Gangaa Tirtha , at Ishi'ba'r, Nishat

G.M. College of Education
Raipur, Bantalab
Jammu.
Acc. No. 10,670
Dated 5/12/2013

vii. Gupta Ganga Tirtha

Ishi'ba'r, Nishat,

Close to the famous Mughal Garden, Nishat, is situated the village of Ishi'ba'r, famous for the "Gupta Ganga Tirtha: Kalhana Pandit in the book ii., of his *Rajatarangin*i, verse 134, has given its name as Isheshavara. As per the local legend it is also called "Vamana Ganga," The legend is related in the *Vishnu Purana* wherein it is said that Bali was a powerful and charitable Rakshas Raja who had sway over all the three worlds (Bhoo, Bhawah and Swah.). In the pursuit of expansion of his kingdom, Bali had ousted gods including Indra from Heaven. In spite of his being most charitable, Vishnu wanted to curb his supremacy and sway. One day when the Rakshas Raja was busy in giving alms to the needy, Vishnu appeared in the guise of a small dwarfish Brahman before him and asked him to give land equal to the length of his three steps in charity. Bali readily agreed. In the first step the pigmy Brahman took all the three worlds (Bhoo, Bhuwah and Swah). In the second step he took all the nether worlds. Now no space was left with Bali for the third step of the Brahman. He put his head before the Brahman for the third step. Vishnu was very much pleased with the truthfulness of the Rakshas king and appeared in his Divine from and blessed him. It is said that while placing his third foot on the head of the king as per promise, a drop of water seeped from the Charana Ganga, of Vishnu. The same drop of water is said to be the stone lined water tank in the vicinity of the properly covered inner spring situated at the Ishi'ba'r Asthapan. There is a similar Tirtha and of the same name at Bhadrawah, Jammu Province of the State.

Close to this holy site (about one thousand meters above the village Ishi'ba'r), there is said to have been the abode of "Sureshori (or Sureshori Tirtha), where lofty temples had been erected in the past as is described in the chronicle, *Rajatarangini* of Kalahana Book v., vv., 37-38. The abodes of Shiva and Goddess Durga had been constructed on a rock that was less steep to hold the structures, as mentioned by Jonraja vide verse number 602 of his *Rajatarangini*. This lofty and splendid structure was razed to the ground by Sultan Skinder, also known as Skinder But Shikan, (1381 -1413 A.D.). A number of remnants of these structures constructed in honour of the Lord and the Goddess existed on the lesser slopes to the east of Dal Lake. But we find no trace of any such structures in the vicinity of this area except some curbs and slabs that we can find scattered in the compounds of the houses of the people residing in the Ishi'ba'r village [1] The Vaishakhi festival on first of Baisakh, the first month of the Vikram era is celebrated here with great religious fervor and gaiety.

A never ending struggle for socio-cultural and political supremacy that erupted the valley from time to time, appears to be the main cause of the destruction of archaeological glory of this area. Besides, the great congregation that is held every year on the eve of Baisakhi at Gupta Ganga shrine has been diverted towards a new temple which appears to be a recent construction. The *Rajatarangini* of Kalhana contains references to a number of shrines in the vicinity of Ishi'ba'r village including the Sureshori shrine but actually neither the position of these shrines nor those of the temples is presently traceable any where in the vicinity of this area. As correctly stated by Stein, the scattered curbs and slabs found in the local springs of the village and now owned by the private residents of this village, could be the remnants of the glorious structure mentioned above. However, the establishment of the world famous Shaiva Ashram by the renowned Shaiva scholar and saint, His Holiness, Swami Lakshman Joo Maharaj, in the lap of the Zabarvana Hillocks, has added and restored the past academic glory of this area to a great extent. It is praiseworthy for all of us to have such an advanced seat of learning of Shaiva philosophy in the vicinity of this world famous sacred place where besides the usual teaching programmes, seminars and symposia on the Shaiva philosophy are held for the world peace and prosperity throughout the year.

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[1] Ardhanareeslfwara, is evidently identical with the one which. (Kalhana) mentions in book, viii.. v .2265 as standing at Sureshori in his own times. Neither the position of this shrine, nor that of the temple can now be traced with certainty. Kalhana, *Rajatarangini*, Trans. by Stein, M.A., Vol I, book V., v. 37 p.190 (fn).

Chapter- iii

Fairs and Festivals

Kashmir has been a land of festivals and festivities from the very dawn of human civilization. Our fore-fathers have virtually been allowed to reside in the valley on the sole condition that not only will they observe and respect but also adore and celebrate the rites and rituals, treats and festivals, and life-style of the aboriginals or predecessors who lived in this land which is named, "the heaven on earth". Taking into account the geographical, geological and environmental conditions of the state, we can easily say that these are, to a great extent, completely different from those found in the planes of the sub-continent. The climate of this region is colder and it is not so severe during summers, as we find it in some other parts of India. The farmer of the valley stops the work in the fields when a cloud appears on the horizon whereas the Indian peasant starts the process of cultivation on the advent of the clouds. The clouds have most often brought devastation and forced the people of the valley confinement due to the cold spell whereas it brings hope and prosperity for the people of the subcontinent. It is perhaps due to this very fact that a person has to think twice before claiming that Kalidasa belonged to the soil of Kashmir for his praise for the clouds in his world famous *Meghaduta.* [1]

Like other parts of the subcontinent, the residents of the valley too have divided the year into four seasons, like spring, summer, autumn and winter. These are subdivided into six Ritus like, Basant, Grisham, Varsha, Sharad, Hemant and Shishar and each Ritu is spread over a period of two months. Having full faith in and reverence for the planets of the galaxy we reside in, we have named our days and attributed them to the seven major planets that revolve round our sun. Our Ravivar /Athvar (Sunday) is attributed to the Sun, Tsandervar/ Somvar (Monday) to the moon, Bhomvar (Tuesday) to Mars, Bo'dvar/ Budhvar to Mercury, Brasvar/ (Guruvar/ Bhargavar) to Jupiter, Shokrvar/ Bharghawar to Venus and Bhatavar/ Shani-Shanashchar-var) to Saturn. In view of the fact that we have remained associated with agriculture from ancient times, all our fairs and festivals, pilgrimages and outings have remained subordinate to the calendar preferably suiting our farming activities and mainly associated with our cultivators. Our feasts have remained noteworthy when our harvesting was prosperous and we prayed to our gods and goddesses with folded hands when our storehouses were empty. In this way our Springs and Autumns were meant for looking after the fields and crops with short and little time consuming outings whereas Summers invited long excursions and travels and the Winter was a season for the feasts and festivals that could be enjoyed within our homes and hearths. The people of Kashmir have always celebrated and enjoyed all those festivals and fairs that the people of the sub-continent have been celebrating and for this purpose we have even created our own replicas of the places of pilgrimage and of socio-religious importance so as to identify ourselves with the religious and mythological mainstream of Bharata..

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[1] *Meghaaloke bhavati sukhino api anithaa vritta cheetah I*
Kanthaa shelesho pranayana jane kim punah doora samsthe II
Meghadoot by Kalidasa

1. *NAVREH*

New Year's Day

A year is called Samvatsara in Sanskrit language and besides depicting the meaning of a 'year', it also means an 'era'. The word, 'Samvat' is used for a 'year' in our daily conversation and astrologers use it in all their astrological calculations. In ancient Sanskrit literature the word, Samvatsara has been used by our astrologers more freely with the result that it was taken as the synonym for the person (astrologer) itself. Hence we have the word 'Samvatsara' for the astrologer in many of our *Puranas* including the *Vishnudharmottara Purana* and the *Nilamata Purana*. The 'Samvatsara', astrologer, held a very high administrative position in our past history and he was very much revered and had an elevated and esteemed position in the society. As a whole [1] The ancient astrological studies confirm that the following five shades of the word Samvatsaras were commonly known to the ancient Indian astrologers:-

1.Samvatsara, 2.Parivatsara, 3. Idavatsara, 4. Anuvatsara, and 5. Vatsara.

In ancient times Kashmir had a peculiar practice of having two Samvatsaras in a single year. The first was celebrated on the first day of the dark half of Margasheersha at the end of the Kartika Shokla Purnamashi, when the valley of Kashmir was liberated by Kashyapa from the deep waters of the Satisara and from the menace of the water-born demon Jalodbhava. The people assembled there on that day and celebrated the occasion in the company of the Rishi. The day being a Pooranamanta, it was named Nava Samvatsara because the land of Kashmir was born on this day and the progeny of Kashyapa inhabited this newly emerged land and celebrated the occasion. It may be stated that all the months of the year are Amananta including the one known as Samvatsara or the New Year's Day of the Vikram era celebrated on the first day of Chaitra Shokla throughout the length and breadth of this country in a number of ways and under different local names.

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[1] *Brahma Purane: Maargasheersha Maasaysaarambhe pratipadyapi. I*
Navasamvatsaraarambho Daivah Kritayoge kritahI II
Kashyapena cha Kaashmiraa nirmitahcha sushobhanaah I
Tasmaat tatra naaraih kaaryah sadaa punya mahotsava II
Pushpair maalyairgeetavaadhyaira bhangalair dhrishta shobhitaih I
Paanai ratnaistatha vastrair upayukhtair naraistatha II
Krityakalpataru, R.N.Temple MSS. Lib., Jammu, No:2684,folio 114 (b)
Samvatsara virudastu tyajyo Raajaa Purohita II
Purohitp anyathaa Rajyo yatha maataa yathgaa pita I
Vishnudharmotara Pu., !!. 5. 54(B).55(A).
Poojiyet dhanaudhena daivagyam sapurodhasam I
Yathaashakti dijaanshchaanyan bhayam chaiva ghoshiyet II
Nilamata Pu., 860.

It may be recalled that the Sun and the Moon pass through the twelve zodiac signs during the course of one year. The Sun generally leaves the Pisces zodiac sign (Mina), (the twelfth or the last of the zodiac signs) at the close of the second fortnight of Phalguna (Shokla) or in the beginning of the dark fortnight of Chaitra (Krishna) and it enters the Aries zodiac sign (the first of the twelve zodiac signs) before or during the first bright fortnight of Chaitra (Shokla). In the same way, the Moon also enters the first zodiac sign Aries on or before the first day of the said fortnight and thus the first day of the New Year begins when the Sun and the Moon leave Pisces and proceed or are stationed in the zodiac sign Aires. In India, we celebrate a number of New Years like the Nanak Shahi Nava Varsha that begins on the first of Chaitra, The Vikrami Nava Varsha, the Shaka Samvat, the Saptarshi Samvat, all based on either on the Solar or on theLunar calculations and are held on the first day of the bright half of Chaitra (Shokla). We also celebrate the Christian New Year on the first of January which is based on the Latin/Roman astrological calculations.

Presently the Hindus of the valley celebrate the first day of the bright fortnight of Chaitra Shokla Paksha as Navareh or as the Samvatsara and the first day of the New Year as contained in the *Nilamata Purana* The composer of the *Purana* has discussed this festival in detail and the description is extended over more than 84 verses of the *Purana* (from vv. 583 to 667). The activities on this date particularly include the Brahma Poojana and other celebrations connected with it. It is considered as the f[illegible] day of the creation of this universe that invites the worship of Brahma and observance of the Mahashanti. The Mahashanti festival is celebrated for the procurement and preservation of Shri 'Wealth'. It also includes the worship of Vishnu and Maheshwara, all the planets and constellations, divisions of time, fourteen Devendras and Manus, the sages, the daughters of Daksha, other goddesses, seven continents, nine divisions of Bharata, seven upper worlds and the nether worlds, five elements, the *Puranas*, mountains, rivers, various demi gods, different courses of time, the year, months and days and the deities presiding over them. It is an occasion of feasting with friends and relatives. The veneration of gods and deities, after taking part in such feastings, named as "Poojana", is complete after their return to their heavenly abodes, pleased and satisfied which is called, "Visarjana,".[1]

In fact all the fifteen days of Chaitra Shokla Paksha are described as a fortnight of celebrations in the *Nilamata Purana*. On the 5th day, the *Purana,* besides advocating the worship of Skanda, lays emphasis on the worship of Shri, the goddess of wealth and hence we call this day Shri Panchami.[2] The 6th day of the fortnight is specially celebrated for the good health of children of the family, and is named as the 'Balaka Raksha Kari Shyashti'.[3] Though the *Purana* advocates such celebrations on all the sixth days of the bright fortnights (Shokla Shyashtis) of the year yet the celebrations on this particular day have been stressed as a special case.

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[1] *Chaitra shokla samaarambhe prathme ahne Kaashyapa I*
Pitaamahasya kartavya tada pooja vichakshanai II
Tasminaivaahne kartavya Mahaashaanti dvijottama I
Aadyena rakshinaarthaaya Shriyastat praapnaaya cha II
Tasminaivaahne kartavya pooja Kaalsya Kaashipa I
Tasmin Kaalsya ganana pravrittaa poorvameva tu II
Kritvopaasam Jagadbhartur yanti sthaanaanvatah param I
Swani swani dvijashreshtha hrishta pushtaa divoukasah II
Nilamata Pu., vv. 583,585-86, and 667

[2] *Chaitre maase site pakshe panchamyaam dvijastama I*
Shriyascha poojanam kaaryam prokhta Shri Panchamee tu sa II
Ibid. v., 668.

[3] *.Dhruveyam chaitra shyashthee cha parisheshaastu kaamatah I*
Yah karoti grihe tasya virogaah sarva baalakaah II
Ibid., , v. 673

On the 9th day of the said fortnight, the *Purana* lays down the worship of goddess Bhadrakali also named as Sureshvari who is considered to be over and above all the goddesses and deities and hence named 'Sureshvari. [1] The 11th day of the fortnight is meant for the worship of the deity looking after the whole house and the *Purana* has named its worship as Vastu (building) Pooja or veneration of the deity of the house where we live along with our family. [2] On the 12th day, besides venerating god Vasudeva, the devotees have been advised to keep a pitcher of cold and fresh water decorated with herbs and flowers and place the same before the picture of Kamadeva also named as Madana,(the god of love), painted on a sheet of cloth. On the 13th day of the fortnight it has further been advocated that the husbands should bathe their wives before sunrise with the water thus preserved in the pitcher and the chronicler has named it as the celebrations connected with the Madana Triyodashi .[3] .

The *Purana* says that on the 15th day of the fortnight Nikumbha, the Pishacha Chief, leaves the valley of Kashmir to proceed to the Sea of Sand to fight with the arrogant Pishachas there. The devotees have been advised to make a clay- image of the Pishacha (Deity), residing in each house and worship it on the concluding day of this fortnight. [4]

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[1] *Sarvaa yaa navami poojya Bhadrakaalee Sureshshvaree I*
Kaaryasiddhim avaaphnoti tasyam poojiyitaa narah II
Nilamata Pu ., v. 675.

[2] *Ekaadashyam to chaitrasya shoklapakshe dvijottama I*
Tasyam poojaa cha kartavya vaastor Braahmana pungava II
Ibid , v. 676.

[3] *Dvaadashi ya tu chaitrasya shokla nityam uposhitaih I*
Vaasudevasya kartavya poojaa dvija yathaavidhi II
Chaitrashoklatriyodashyam Kaamadevam cha poojayet I
Patastham vividhair maalairgandharuchchaavachais tatha II
Dvaashyam sheetatoyasya kumbham pushpopa shobhitam I
Kaamadeva agratah sthapyam pallavaishchopa shobhitam II
Aanarkaamya udhitya kaale snaapya syath tena vaarinaa I
Dayitaa Dvija shaardoolaswayam kaantena Kaashyapa II
Ibid.,vv.,*678-79,681-82.*

[4] *Chaitra maasi site pakshe panchadashyam dvijottama I*
Yodhum yati Nikumbhastu Pishachan Baalukaarnave II
Ibid., . *v.,683.*

Navreh- The New Years' Day is celebrated on the first day of the bright fortnight of Chaitra (the twelfth month of the Vikram era). The Hindus of the valley start the celebrations in a peculiar way. Early in the morning the children of the house are anxious to show the 'Thal' to all the members of the family and get the coin or money placed on the rice in it. Besides the rice, it also contains walnuts,(as many as the numbers of the family), a morsel of cooked rice, a piece of bread, curd, milk, a mirror, a pen, the new calendar (Almanac), called 'Nechipater', a printed portrait of Mother Goddess called 'Kroola' Pachh' some almond-blossoms or flowers, some blades of fresh grass, a small root of the "Vai" herb and a coin. The ritual of decorating all these things on a plate filled with rice is called 'Thal Barun,' and it is done late on the previous night. The ritual is completed after the 'Thal' is seen in the morning on the New Year's Day, 'Navareh,' and we call this whole process as, 'Buth Vuchhun'. Looking at the 'Thal' on the eve of New-year's morning, that contains all these items, is considered to be an auspicious omen. It may be recalled that the 'Saptarshi' calendar of Kashmir starts from the first day of the bright half of 'Chaitra'. However, the children now a days are not satisfied with a coin or two, so the parents have to put a sufficient amount of money on 'the Thal'. Besides, if the marriage of a son has taken place in the family recently, it is considered a good gesture on the part of the bride to show the 'Thal' to all the members of the family and thus receive the presents or money from her father-in-law who places it in the 'Thal'. Yellow salted-rice is cooked out of this rice. Previously the walnuts placed on the Thal were thrown into a running stream or a pond before taking a bath there. With the provision of bath-rooms in our modern houses, this practice has ceased since long and now these are offered to children of those who help us in our family chores.

"Navareh", means the 'light', or 'flame' anything that ignites light, fire/warmth. This day besides being the 1st day of the Indian calendar, is also considered as the beginning of the Spring Season and the end of the cold spell in the valley. The continuous cold and snowfall during winter makes a period of three months a monotonous period for the people of the valley. They come out of their houses and arrange an outing on this day. With a change in the season all young and old wear new clothes. The young and the children celebrate the day by arranging an outing whereas the elders start arrangements for decorating their 'Pooja'-rooms to welcome Mother Goddess 'Durga:' on 1st of Navaratra also called Navaratri. The word meaning of 'Navaratri' is 'Nine Nights'. According to the *Devi Mahatmya*, Goddess Durga attains the following nine forms during these nine nights beginning from the First Navaratra: -

1. Shaila Putri, 2. Brahmacharini, 3. Chandraghanta,
4. Kushmanda, 5.Skanda Mata, 6. Kantyayani,
7. Kalaratri, 8. Maha Gauri, and , 9. Siddhi Dhatri.[1]

The devotees keep a fast on all the nine days and sow some barley in a pot and sprinkle it with water and milk while worshipping it everyday. It starts sprouting on the third or fourth day of sowing and it grows to a good height by the eighth/ninth day of 'Durga Ashtami' and "Rama Navmi' respectively. In this way there is a busy schedule for the members of the whole family, young and old, for all the days of Navaratra actually extending over a period of ten days. This type of fasting, feasting and celebrations that are a part of our religion and the precedence of our ancient rituals and customs, keep our aged gentry busy in the household chores for the full period of ten days of the festival. This type of a busy schedule of fasting and feasting for both young and old has proved a great stimulus to the collective spiritual health of the society, which, it is feared, is now on the verge of total neglect due to the materialistic bent up of mind in the modern youth.

All these festivals and festivities have made the life of the Kashmiri Pa colourful and charming during the past centuries, and it is desirable that we observe such festivals with greater vigour and energy.

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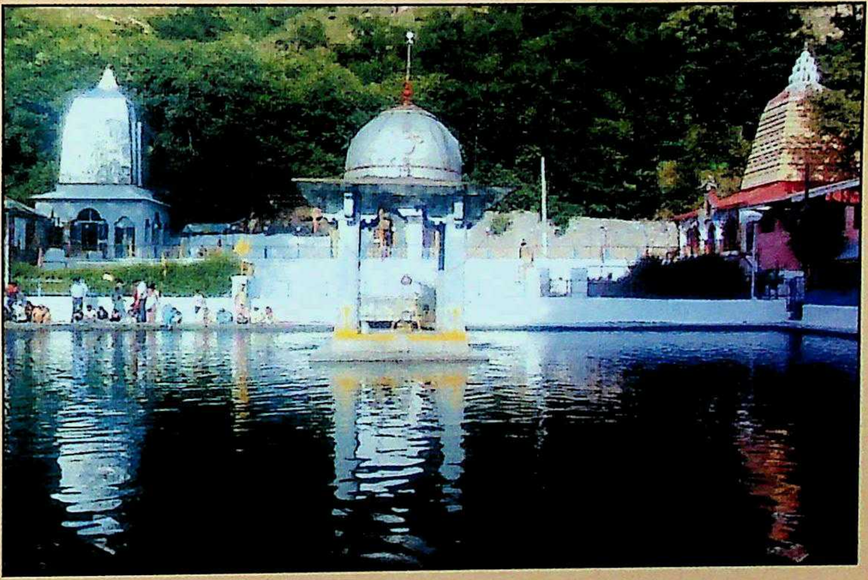
[1] *Ganesha Derga Stotrawali* by Pt.. Keshov Bhatt, 1925, Bombay Ed., p, 64. v.. 10.



Surya Tirtha at Mattan /Bhawan, (Martand) Kashmir

2. *Vijay Saptami* -

Martand Tirtha, (Mattan).

On the occurrence of an auspicious horal constellation, 'Nakshetra', on the 'Saptami Tithi' (the seventh day) of the bright fortnights of some of the selected months of Vikram era falling on a Sunday, the possibility of Vijay Saptami, a very auspicious moment, is said to take place on such an occasions. While "Vijay" means, "Victory", the word "Saptami" has a locative meaning in Sanskrit grammar/astrology, meaning an occasion that includes the date and the month, the location of stars, constellations, and the place where holding of the ritual lead one to the attainment of 'victory'. On this date and horal moment a good number of Hindus visit the Martand Tirtha at Mattan, commonly known as Bhawan. It is also called the Surya Tirtha in our scriptures and is famous for making offerings to the manes and performing rites in honour of our dead forefathers. The devotees, after shaving off their hair and beard, called "Mundan", hold a Tirtha Shraaddha of their manes on the banks of the stream flowing out from the Martand Spring, called 'tsaka' in the local language.

Martand or Bhawan is situated at a distance of nearly fifty Km from Srinagar on the Anantnag-Pahalgam road and has a special place among the famous Surya Tirthas of the sub-continent since ancient times. The scattered old ruins of the ancient temples in the vicinity and outskirts of this area, stand a testimony to this fact that the town was a great centre of the Sun-worship since times immemorial. It is because of this very fact that the ancient scriptures like the *Martand Mahatmya*, names it as Martand (Surya) Tirtha. It says that Aditi, the wife of Kashyapa gave birth to a lifeless lump or egg, which she immersed into the waters of Satisara and with the penance of Kashyapa, it was given life and the name of Martand (the Sun) and its luster took the form of the Mother Goddess 'Bhargashikha', whose temple is situated at the lower slopes of the mountain to the east of this tirtha. [1]

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[1] *Poorva Satisarasya magna Mritaandakhandaat ,*
Pradurbabhoova Ravirashmimayam mahoyat I
Maartanda ityamidhaya prathitim jagaama,
Tasya Aadhi Shaktirasi Bhargashikhe! tvameva II
Martanda Mahatmya

The *Nilamata* tells about the worship of the sun under its various names, like Aryaman, Arka, Divakara, Surya, Savitr, Martanda, etc. It clearly negates the theory put forth by some scholars that the worship of the Sun was brought into the valley by the Iranians. Unfortunately, most part of the verses of the *Nilamata,* describing the worship of the sun, are missing in the texts that have reached to us till date. Only a fraction of verse (No. 468, b.), and (vs., 469 and 470), the concluding two verses of section seventh of the *Purana*, advocating the worship of the Sun, have been found till date. It may be added that the *Purana* lays emphasis on the worship of the Sun on all the seventh days of the bright half of each month of the year especially during the days of Magha and Ashada. The copyist while copying the manuscript has closed verse No: 470 of the *Purana* with the words " *Iti Shri Nilamate Saptamyah*", [1] ' thus ends the interpretation of Saptami or the seventh canto of the *Nilamata Purana*.' The *Nilamata* has mentioned the veneration of the Sun and the Moon at a number of places as, 'Chandra-Dewakarau' that again speak of the importance of the Sun-worship by the people of ancient Kashmir.

According to the *Martand Mahatmya*, Aditi, the wife of Kashyapa, gave birth to a life-less egg 'Mritand', the eighth one out of her thirteen children. It was due to the penance of Kashyapa that a 'Ray of light' was born out of the life-less egg, hence named as 'Martand, (Mrita + anda'). Kalhana in the fourth book of the *Rahajarangini*, v. 192, has clearly stated that King Lalitaditya Mukhtapida (724–761A.D.) built the wonderful shrine of Martand with its massive walls of stone within a lofty enclosure, known as 'Prasadantara', with the support of eighty-four pillars, an astrological calculation representing twelve months multiplied by seven days of a week. According to one more theory contained in a number of the *Puranas* like, *Adhi Purana* - 7, 10; *Bhagwat Purana* - 5, 20, 44; and *Brahmanda Purana* – 3, 7, 278-88; there are twelve 'Suryas' for the twelve Zodiac signs and out of these the eighth one is named as 'Martand'. *Anushasan Parva* of the *Mahabharata* (177–11) refers to Martand as the master of Kamadhenu. There is a reference in the *Rig Veda* (10, 72, 8-9) which says that the Supreme Mother of the gods gave birth to eight sons. She returned to the Heaven with her seven children leaving the eighth one behind as being Mritand or Martand.

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[1] *Tasyatitoshamaayati sagano Bhaaskarah swayam II*

. . . .

Evam eva vidhi kaaryastathaa Maaghasya saftameem I
Aashaadha saftameem chaiva yasho vijaya kaankhshibhih II
Saftamee trittaryam chaiva dhruvam etad dvijottama I
Saftameesho atha sarvaasu Surye loke maheeyate II
Nilamata Pu., vv. 468 (b),469-70.

The *Tantraloka Vivekah*, by Jayrath, (12th c. A.D.), a commentary on the *Tantralokah* of Abhinavagupta published under the *Kashmir Granthawali.* explains the word Martand in a different way. It says that 'on the occurrence of the Shabda Brahma (Om) for the first time in the universe, it penetrated into all the thirty six elements multiplied by nine, an astrological calculation. Afterwards from a part of this Brahmanda (universe) a portion rose up that assumed the form of Martandi. With the passage of time that portion of the universe/time was named Martand in the Kali Era'.[1]

While highlighting the importance of the Martand Tirtha, the *Nilamata Purana* clearly states that on seeing the Divakara (sun), also known as Kartaveeryarjuna Swamin at Martand and Kashyapa Swamin also called Ravi, the images of which were erected by Vishvagashva there, one obtains the merit of gifting a horse (Ashvamedha),.[2]

The famous Surya temple at Martand has remained the glory of the valley for a long time and some of the foreign travellers have made a mention of this in their travelogues. The Surya temple existed at Martand majestically even up to Alberuni's visit to the valley (11th century). Jonraja (c. 1380-1451 A.D.) has clearly mentioned that the temple at Martand was raised to the ground during the reign of Sultan Sikander (1381 – 1413 A.D.). To quote the words of Jonraj, "How could the other (places of worship) survive when the great monuments of Martand, Vijayesha, Chakrabrit and

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[1] *Shabdabrahmapadaateetaa Shathtrimshaanta naavantagaa I*
Brahmaanda khandaat utteerna Martandee murti khyaya I
Saa kalaa leeyate yasyam Maartandi Kalikochyate II
Tantraloka Vivekah, Kashmir Granthawali Part, 3rd, p. 178

[2]. *Kaartaveeria Swaamin drishtwaa tam cha Diwaakaram I*
Maartandam Kashyapaswaamim Vishva Gashva Kritam Ravim II
Drishau ekaikam athai teblyoo hayadanaphalam labhet II
Nilamata Pu., v.,v {(1055-56 {b}).

Tripureshvara were not spared by him (Skinder).[1] It seems that the chronicler has made the mention of all these tirthas according to their popularity among the general masses at the time of compiling his chronicle.

According to the astronomical calculations the difference between the solar and the lunar calendar is nearly 10 days in a year and it accumulates into one month after a period of every three years. Hence a period of one month is added to the lunar year after the expiry of every three years to synchronize it with the solar year. It is known as the additional month or 'Masadhik.' This makes the lunar calendar to coincide with the solar calendar. Besides, non-occurrence of 'Sankranti' in a period of two fortnights of a lunar month makes such an addition necessary. The first 30 days of such an addition is called 'Mallmas' and the later period of 30 days is called 'Bhanumas'. The full month of 'Masadhik' is consecrated to the manes and the scriptures direct us to perform the Shraadha ceremony of the manes at the famous 'Surya Tirtha', Mattan, or 'Martand,' at Anantnag, Kashmir and the Hindus of the sub-continent make a pilgrimage to this Tirtha during this period, especially on Sundays, called 'Raviwar,' the day attributed to the sun.[2]

Besides the special occasions of holding religious congregations at this famous *Tirtha* on some specified Sundays, dedicated to the worship of the Sun, the Hindus of the valley throng to this *tirtha* on the occasion of solar and lunar eclipses as well, besides the horal occasion of *Vijay Saptami*. The scriptures describe holding of '*Dwadashi*', rituals in honour of our forefathers preferably, during the whole month of the *Bhanumas*, (Extra month). Holding the ritual of "*Baah*" involves execution of all the death rituals held from the date of death of a person up to the first anniversary. The scriptures say that a man who is desirous of completing all his death rites prior to his/her actual death, has to perform all those death rituals according to the scriptures and he/she is advised to hold such rites at a '*Surya Tirtha*', preferably during the month of '*Bhanumas*'.

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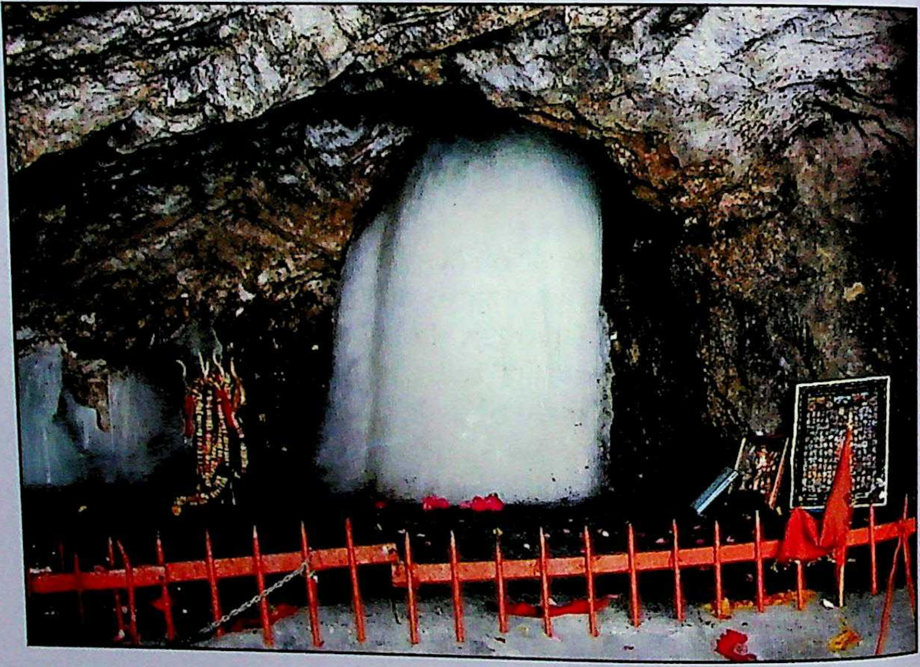
[1] .*Maartanda Vijayeshaan Chakrabrit Tripureshvarah* I
Bhagnaa yenaasys ko vignah shesha bhangena kathyate II
Jonraja Rajatarangini, v., 601

[2] For more details P.S. Kashmir Hindu Sanskars (Rites, Rituals and Customs), by the author, PP., 388-90.

For these reasons the '*Surya Tirtjha*' of *Martand*, Kashmir, has remained a place of great pilgrimage for performing such rites since times immemorial. It may be pointed out that the following four famous *Surya Tirthas* are prominent centers of pilgrimage in the sub-continent as described in our scriptures:-

1.*Mulasthana* (*Multan*,) 2. *Modhera*, 3. *Konark*, and 4. *Martand*.

Also, *Martand* is one of the prominent places for the night halt of the Holy Mace on its way to the cave of *Swami Amarnath Ji* during Amareshvar Yatra. It is the duty of all our brothers' world over, to protect the sanctity and the prestige of this *Surya Tirtha* located at the ancient *Martand Tirtha* at *Mattan*, Kashmir.



Shiva Peetha at Swami Amarnath Ji, Kashmir.

3. *Shravana Punim*

Swami *Amreshvar* Pilgrimage

One day Parvati was prompted by Narada, to look into the reason why Shiva wore the garland of skulls (Runda Mala). She was also instigated to enquire from Shiva the deep secrets that governed the attainment of power to control ones death. The matter being most unusual, Shiva informed his spouse that mention of such secret matters involved complete secrecy so much so that such conversations should not be over-heard even by other gods. So, according to the *Amreshvara Mahatmya*, Shiva directed one of his Ghanas, Kalagni to locate a secluded area for the purpose. The area found by Kalagni for the purpose where Shiva revealed the secrets of Amritava, (controlling death) to Parvati, attained the name of Amreshvara. This is what the *Mahatmya* tells us.

It may not be out of place to mention that during ancient times all the pilgrimage centers, besides having the religious sanctity, were connected with trade and commerce of that region. Thus the pilgrims from Kashmir, both Hindus and the Buddhists, visited the holy places of the sub-continent from Rameshvaram to Badrinath and from Dwarika ji to the temples at Jaggannath Ji. In the same way our exclusive pilgrim centers prompted the pilgrims of the sub-continent to visit our holy places like, Sharada Devi, Ksheer Bhawani and Amarnath Ji, both, out of devotion and for trade and commerce.

Besides, the legend contained in the *Amreshvara Mahatmya* confirms that Shiva narrated the Amar Gatha to his consort Parvati in the cave of Amarnath Ji. There are a number of folk songs and folk stories connected with the appearance of Lord Shiva at its present place known as Amreshvara. One such folk story/song contains that in ancient times there was a shopkeeper at Durga Nag, Srinagar, named So'di' Wo'ni' who used to climb the hillock of Shankaracharya wearing his wooden slippers with a pitcher of fresh water on his shoulders to wash and venerate the deity at the temple of *Shiva* on the top of the hillock. He had been doing so daily all his life. After worshipping the deity for a very long time, one day he did not attain the choicest joy that he previously used to attain after undergoing such a difficult job. Disgusted, he experienced the same feeling day after day. He now cursed his own self for the unusual feeling. Much worried, one night he dreamed that Lord Shiva asked him to meet Him at a place named Shishram Nag (Shesh Nag) located in the hilly terrains of Pahalgam. The lord also gave him a glimpse of His new abode. Next morning So'di' Wo'ni' left his home in search of the new abode of Shiva and reached Pahalgam, ' the village of shepherds,' after a great wandering. Here he described the location to the shepherds who knew hilly terrains for they used to graze their herds there. One of the herdsmen admitted that he knew the location that So'di' Wo'ni' wanted to reach. Accordingly he accompanied the herdsman and they reached the place after a great search. On reaching the hill top which he had seen in his dream previously, So'di' Wo'ni' gave some money to the shepherd and compensated him by offering his own blanket as a gift. The shepherd took the money and the blanket and returned home. On the way he felt that there was something tied in the corner of the blanket and seeing that there were some leftover charcoals in the blanket, he threw them into a flowing stream and reached home when it was very late in the night. His wife asked him the reason for his unusual delay and absence from home so long. He related to her the whole story. In the meantime his wife asked him that the corner of his blanket seemed to be burning as something was shining in the corner of it. The shepherd opened the blanket to see that a piece of charcoal from the lot he had thrown away in the running stream had got stuck in the corner of the blanket and it had turned into a diamond. He immediately rushed to the stream where he had thrown away the charcoals but it was too late. A great fortune had been lost by him.

So'di' Wo'ni', on the other hand, was pleased to see the gem like lake in the lap of snow covered mountain peaks and Shiva and his consort waiting for him in a heavenly carriage (Viman) for taking him to the Eternal Abode of the

Shiva Loka on the auspicious day of 'Shravana Poornima'. This episode is contained in one of the ancient folk songs of Kashmir and a few lines from the song are reproduced below:

Nirvaasan, vanta kati chon Aasan,
Andakaar kaastam vandayou praan I
Kartam So'di Vaanin hish Aash mati,
Chham chaini Aash mati pooran kar II

Where can I find you O formless one,
To remove my ignorance,
I would easily give-up my life breath,,
If only you would extend your helping hand to me
As you did to So'di' Wani,
You are my only hope to fulfill my desire
To reach to the Final Destination.

The *Nilamata Purana* has a single verse claiming that one who bathes in the Amreshvari, (the Amravati rivulet flowing at the foot of the famous cave of Amarnath ji,) gets the merit of gifting one hundred cows.[1]

Kalhana, while describing the reign of king Nara, also known as Kinnara, gives an account of the pilgrimage to Amreshvara in Book I, v., 267 of the *Rajatarangini.* After giving the names of four kings that followed king Gonanda III, Kalhana asserts that king Nara built the temple of Vijayesh besides laying the city of Narapura that was parallel to the Alkapuri of Kubera in grandeur and luxury.[2] King Nara, the chronicler claims, was a staunch Buddhist in the beginning but on visualizing the wicked deeds of some Baudhas, his mind changed and he embraced Hinduism and became its staunch follower. From the verse No: 203 of Book 1st, the chronicler starts the legend of Sushravas Naga and the young Brahman, Vishoka, who much fatigued, went to a spring (Nag) to take rest in the shade of a tree and to drink water. Here he came into contact with two Naga Princesses, Irawati and Chandralekha, the daughters of the Naga Chief Takshaka. He also came to know that an ascetic, who also served as a field-guard, had caused distress to the whole tribe of Takshak Naga.[1] Vishoka helped the Naga Chief and his tribe to come out of the distress and misfortune. In return Takshaka gave him his daughter Chandralekha in marriage and offered him a grand palace fitted with all amenities and luxuries, for his stay in the city of Narapura. Thus the Brahman lived peacefully for a long period in the city of Narapura. Soon a curse fell on the couple when the Chieftain of the city wanted to marry the beautiful eyed Naga Princess, Chandralekha, the spouse of Vishoka. When all his attempts were repulsed by the Brahman, he applied force to get her. He invaded the palace of the Brahman and the couple left the residence from the back door when the soldiers of the local chief attacked it. They sought refuge at the abode of Sushravas Naga who had chosen a lake of dazzling white water, like the sea of milk, "Ksheer Sagara", in the lap of far off mountains on the way to the famous pilgrimage to Amreshavara. Those who undergo this pilgrimage, can come across the lake of Vishoka, known as ' Zamte'r ' or 'Jamatri Sarah'- (son-in-law's lake), next to the Shesh Naga also known as 'Shishram Nag'.[2] R.L. Stein, while translating the *Rajatarangini,* has given a vivid description of the tirtha[3] Dr. Raghunath Singh, while commenting on the word 'Amarnath' quoted by Jonraja in v. 874 of his *Rajtarangini,* has rightly said that the reference does pertain to the lofty building that was constructed in the vicinity of Martatand to manage and handle the great pilgrimage to the famous tirtha, 'Amreshvara,' visited by people every year from far off places of the sub-continent.

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[1] *Amreshe narah snaatvaa goshatasys phalam labeth.* I
Nilamata P.u., v. 1372 (a)..

[2] Kalhana, *Raajtarangini*, Book 1st., v.,303

After a long and hazardous journey for a number of days the devotees reach to the sacred cave on the fifteenth bright half of the month of Shravana or Savan known as 'Shravna Poornima', to have the first glimpse of Swami Amarnath ji. People from all the states of India and even from abroad come to Kashmir ahead of the scheduled date so as to take part in this pilgrimage. This day is exclusively meant for offering prayers at Swami Amarnath Cave of Lord Shiva where an ice Shiva Lingam is formed of its own. People observe total austerity on this date and every body, young and old, keep a fast. People have the belief that the two pigeons that appear in the cave on the date of the annual pilgrimage, are the two devotees or Ganas of Shiva who over heard the Amar Gatha revealed by Shiva to Parvati at this solitary place. They had to face the wrath of Shiva, for their audacity and lest they should reveal the Gatha to any undeserving one, they were turned into pigeons. The other places of pilgrimage that the devotees visit on this day in the valley of Kashmir are, 'Thajiwara' known as 'Tha'jiwo'r' near Bijbihara town. Those who cannot go to the cave abode at Amarnath, visit this place for holding special prayers. While the pilgrims pay their obeisance to the 'Ice Lingam' at the cave of Amarnath ji, other devotees worship the Lingam of Shiva at Thajiwara temple. Besides the local temples, a number of people visit the Shankarachayra temple near Srinagar city and they prepare sweetmeats on this day and illuminate the local Shiva temples in the evening on this auspicious day.

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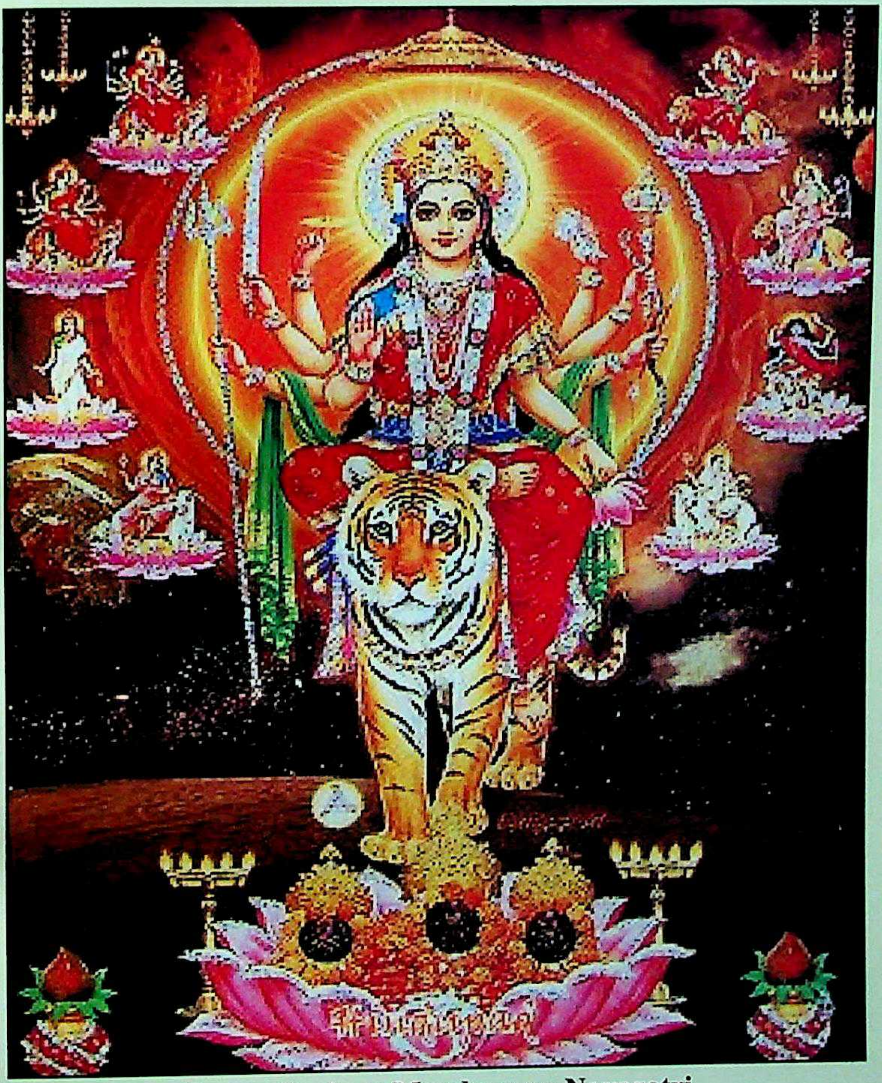
[1] Kalhana *Rajatarangini*, Book 1st, v. 233.

[2] Ibid., Book 1st.,v., 267.

[3] Ibid., Vol. II., Appendices-Notes, Chap. III, Sec. iv p., 409.

The present Government has constituted a Shrine Board for the maintenance of the holy shrine and management of the pilgrimage. This Board has now extended the pilgrimage to the holy cave over a period of nearly two months so as to give a boost to the tourist trade in the State.

The people all over India celebrate Shravana Poornima as 'Raksha Bandhan' day. Sisters make preparations for the celebrations of this festival a few days earlier. They purchase 'Rakhis' of their choice ahead of the festival. On this day they get up early in the morning and after their return from temples they meet their brothers and tie the 'Rakhis' also known as 'Rakhris' on their wrists. Rakhi is a colourful band of thread with a piece of decorative material in the middle of it. In this way they get gifts from their brothers after they mark their foreheads with red vermilion and offer them sweetmeats as Naiveda. Those ladies who don't have any brothers, tie 'Rakhis' to some one among their close relatives and thus make him their brothers and thus up-hold the ancient Indian tradition of sweet sister-brother relationship to this day.



Durga Poojana Mandapa on Navaratri

4. *NAVARATRIS*

Nine Nights of Worship and Fasting

After killing the water born demon Jalodbhava in the beginning of the seventh Kalpa of Manu Vaivasuta, the chief among gods (Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesha) sages, saints, and the Nagas heaved a sigh of relief and they took their seats for a short rest so as to deliberate on taking future steps for the settlement of people in the newly emerged valley of Kashmir. Here, sage Kashyapa got up and said that this holy and charming land may now be allowed to be inhabited by the descendents of Manu together with the Nagas and others. The protests of the Nagas, the sons of Kashyapa, who were not willing to live in the company of men, made him (Kashyapa) furious and he cursed them to live in the company of the Pishachas. It was due to the intervention of Nila that Kashyapa agreed their stay for a period of six months of a year with the descendents of Manu and the remaining six months of the year in the company of the Pishachas.[1]

Thus the current batch of Aryan dwellers, that accompanied the great sage, was allowed to settle in the valley for six months of summer and they had to migrate to the plains for the six months of winter every year. This is a clue to the pre-historic arrival of the Indo-Aryan batches into the valley who, being superior to the native dwellers, established their upper hand and started their territorial expansions and cultural amalgamations in the whole valley. The amalgamation remained calm at the surface but it had an under current which gave vent to itself a little later and the effect was felt just before the start of the Kali era. The migration from the plains to the valley started in spring every year on the first Navaratra, which falls on the first day of the bright half of Chaitra. The return journey generally took place during the autumn Navaratra falling on the first day of the bright half of Ashwin. It is presumed that these migratory people observed certain ceremonies and rituals on these auspicious days of their yearly migration, which, on the one hand coincided with the "Navaratra' festivals held in major parts of northern India and, on the other hand, it had some uniformity with the festivities held on such occasions by the aboriginals of the valley, the Pishachas and the Nagas. Though the instructions of the son of Kashyapa, Nila, for the people who desired to reside in the valley, cover the major part of the *Nilamata Purana*, yet it serves as a guideline document for their safety in the valley. These include the Vrittas and the Utsavas and other religious practices then prevalent in the valley and followed by the Nagas and the Pishachas. While the Vrittas mentioned in the *Nilamata* appear as a sacred understanding for the change of day to day food habits on specific days, the Utsavas depicted the celebrations, etc., on certain specific events of importance. But with the passage of time the activities held on such feasts, festivals and celebrations got so inter mingled with one another in between different cults like the Vaishnavites, the Shaivites; and the Shakhtas and even among the Buddhists and other sects that one can hardly classify them separately and exclusively meant for any of the said cults or groups. For instance, the celebrations and Vrittas that we have been observing since times immemorial on the eve of the New Year Day (1st Navaratra) have, no doubt, been classified in the *Purana* under the heading, "Nava Samvatsara", but the celebrations connected with this specific occasion in the remote past are quite different from the celebrations of the present day. The festival of the Navaratris that has now become an inseparable part of our post New Year's Day celebrations is not mentioned in the *Purana*. There is not denying the fact that the *Purana* has impressed upon the devotees that the whole bright fortnight of Chaitra is a period of celebrations as elaborated below:

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[1] *Dattaa tu sahitaastena sasainyeneha vatsyatha* I
Shanmaasaan maaṇavai saardham Nikumhbe nirgte sadaa II
Nilamata Pu. v.: 218

1. The Chaitrama (Amavasya) is dedicated to the manes,
2. Nava Samvatsara; or the New Year's Day involved

worship of Brahma,Vishnu, Mahesha and a number of deities, gods, planets and other constellations,

3.Shri Panchami, being dedicated to the worship of "Shri", or Lakshmi.,

4.Chaitra Shyashti, is dedicated to the worship of "Skanda" - Kumara, for the good health of our children,[1]

5.Chaitra Navami, is specified for the worship of Bhadrakali,

6.Chaitra Ekadashi, or "Vastu Pooja" is held in honour of the deity of architecture, "Vishva Karma ", when the tools used in the house building are worshipped on this day,

7.Chaitra Dvwadashi, is specifically dedicated to the worship of Vasuydeva,

8.Chaitra Triyodashi is meant for the worship of god of love Madana (Kamadeva) for the welfare of the women folk, and

9. Chaitra Poornima - or the Pishacha Prayana Day, is dedicated to seeing off the Pishacha Chief Nikumba, who retreat to the Sea of Sand to fight the arrogant Pishachas living there.

Navaratri is a combination of two words, "Nava" and "Ratri", meaning nine nights, also called Navaratra. According to the *Vishnu Purana*, Mother Goddess in the form of Mohini, deprived the demons from taking the share of nectar, lest they should attain immortality. In fact, short life has always been feared by the demons. Hence they always had a longing for long life and for this purpose they did everything fair and foul to get a boon of longevity. One such legend is contained in the Devi Mahatmya where the chief of the demons, Mahishasura got a boon from Brahma after doing great penance to the effect that even the gods should not be able to kill him. Thus having got the boon, the arrogant Asura started his evil activities and ousted gods from their respective positions. The trinity of the gods, Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesha, requested their spouses, Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Parvati to bestow all their supernatural powers and energy on Mother Goddess, Durga and they also gave their own supernatural powers to her to eliminate the Demon Mahishasura. Thus these nine nights are dedicated to the worship of the three goddesses, Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Parvati with three nights to each goddess so that the evil is eliminated.

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[1] Verses 671(B), 72 and 73, of the *Nilamata Purana* describe the worship of Skanda (an epithet of Shiva/ Kartikeya) with garlands and flowers so that the children of the house remain protected from the particular child diseases, (Skanda).There is pun in the verses on the word, 'Skanda' meaning a particular fatal disease of children, besides Kartikeya. Unfortunately part (A) of the v., 671 of the *Purana* is missing.

Thus the nine days of celebrations are for the worship of nine incarnations of the Mother Goddess as described in the *Devi Mahatmya* as per details given below:[1]

1. Shailpurri (Parvati as the daughter of the Himalaya Raja);
2. Chandraganta, The goddess decorated with the crescent moon and giver of impartial justice;
3. Brahamcharini, Bestowal of eternal love to devotees;
4. Kushmanda, The giver of day to day sustenance to all;
5. Skanda Mata, Bestowal of wisdom to differentiate the right from the wrong;
6. Kantyayani; Our saviour from all evil elements;
7. Kalaratri, The ferocious incarnation of Mother Goddess that killed the demon Rakhtabija;
8. Chamunda, The incarnation of Mother Goddess to kill the demons Chanda and Munda; and
9. Siddhidhatri, The giver of all sorts of knowledge including Mantra, Yantra, and Tantra (Mystic powers).

Her final form is the Supreme Power called Adi /Para Shakti, an embodiment of the three eternal powers of Brahma, Vishnu, Mashesha; and of Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Parvati. She attains the form of Siddhidatri and is the fountainhead of all the powers vested in each of these gods/goddesses. The *Devi Shatak* describes the annihilation of all the demons, like Madhu, Kaitabha, Mahishasura, Chanda, Munda, Rakhtabija and others, by the Supreme Mother by creating illusion in the minds of the Asuras and emerging as the Siddhalakshmi or Siddhidhatri in the form of Para Shakti [1].

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[1] *….., Prathman Shailaputreeti dviteeyam Brahmchaarineem I*
Triteeyam Chandaghanteti Kushmaandeti chaturthakam I
Panchamam Skandamaateti shashtam Kaantyayaneeti cha I
Saftamam Kaalaraatreeti Mahaa Gaureeti chaashtakam I
Navmam Siddhidaatreeti Nava Durgah prakeertitah. II
Ganesha Derga Stotrawali by Pt., Keshov Bhatt, 1925, Bombay Ed., p., 79, v., 154.

There is a detailed description of the battles between Mahishasura (the buffalo faced demon born from the nymph Rambha,) and other demons like Rakhtabija, the Commander of the demons, who was supported by other commanders like, Madhu, Kaitabha, Shumbhu and Nishumbhu and others. The Mother Goddess in Her various forms as described in the *Markandeya Purana* entitled '*Devi Mahatmya*', comprising nearly 700, verses, spread over eleven cantos, contain the following description: -

1st Canto: The arrival of Medha Rishi, who explains to Raja Surath and his Ashram-mates the greatness of the Mother Goddess and the story of the rising of the demon Madhu and Kaitabha;

2nd Canto: appearance of the Mother Goddess before gods and annihilation of the demonic forces by the Mother.

3rd Canto: Annihilation of Mahishasura, the buffalo faced demon, and his other Commanders who could change their form at their will,

4th Canto: Veneration of the Mother by Indra and other gods;

5th Canto: Worship of the Mother by gods and sending of the messenger by the Demon Chief Shambhu and his shameful defeat at the hands of the Mother Goddess;

6th Canto: Killing of the demon Dhoomralochana;

7th Canto: Massacre of the demon Chieftains Chanda and Munda along with their armies:

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[1] *Ya Maaya Madhu Kaitabh pramathinee ya Mahishonmoolinee I*
Ya Dhoomre kshana Chanda Munda mathnee ya Rakhtabeejaashinee II
Shaktih Shumbha Nishumbha Daityadalinee ya Siddha Lakshmeeh Paraa I
Saa Devi Nava koti moortisahitaa maam paatu Maaheshovaree II
Ganesha Derga Stotrawali by Pt., Keshov Bhatt, 1925, Bombay Ed., p. 64, v., 10.

8th Canto: Annihilation of the demon Rakhtabhija, who had a boon that a new demon would spring forth from the drop of his blood that fell on the ground;
9th Canto: Killing of the demon Nishumbha;
10th Canto: Annihilation of the demon Shumbha; and
11th Canto: Adoration of the Supreme Mother by the gods and Her bestowal of blessings to the gods in Her Ninety million forms (Nava Koti Moorti).

There are two solstices in each year, one is the Summer solstice called Uttarayana, six month's period of the year from December 22nd, to June 21st when the sun moves to the North of the Equator and the other is called Dakshinayana, the winter solstices, six month's period from 21st June to December 22nd when the sun moves to the South of the Equator. Accordingly the festival of Navaratra is also celebrated twice each year, one on the first day of the bright half of Chaitra and the other is on the first day of the bright half of Ashvayuji (Ashwin). This is the only festival, which is celebrated twice in a year and that too for a period of nearly ten days each time. The days of celebrating the festival twice in a year, coincided with the journey of our ancestors to and from the valley, a mention of which has been made earlier. It appears that with the passage of time the festival has attained a special historical significance throughout the subcontinent.

5. *Vinayaka Tsoram*

Worship of Ganesha

The rituals, that have got religious sanction or *Dharma* of the concerned society, survive for a longer period than those, which the society adopts by imitation from other societies or civilizations. Besides the *Vedas* and the *Puranas*, the *Bhagwad Gita,* is considered as the essence of all the *Vedas* and *Puranas* and which depicts a way of life for the whole Indian society, in its third canto - a treatise on *Karma-Yoga*, couplets 10-15, lay emphasis on the sanctity of rituals which have followed the Dharma from the very beginning. Before one can understand the reason and meaning of rituals of the Indian society one has to make great sacrifices, not in the form of making bodily penance or killing any living thing but in the form of killing ones own enemies found in ones own self in the form of *Kama, Krodha, Lobha, Moha, Mada* and *Ahankara* - the six demons which hamper our faith in Dharma. The faithful, who have strong faith in Dharma and the normal activities connected with it, defeat these demons associated with ones own self and these can never dare to raise their heads. This is what all Hindus believe in.

Our one such ritual is 'Vinayaka Chaturthi'. 'Vinayaka' is one of the names given to 'Lord Ganesha' - the propeller of all our actions according to the Hindu mythology. It is pertinent to point out that only the *Nilamata Purana* has used the term Nandi Ganesha as one of the Gana's of Shiva, and not as the ride of Shiva.[1] Like many other *Puranas*, the names Vinayaka, Gangeya ,Ganadhipati and Ganapati, have been used at a number of places in various other verses in the said *Purana* [2] While discussing the veneration of various gods and deities during the Nava Samvatsara, Nila Naga impresses upon Brihadashva, the worship of Vinayaka also. It is worthwhile to mention here that in the said verse the word Vinayaka has been used in the plural form to glorify the presence of such Tirthas/deities in abundance in the valley of Kashmir. [1] At another place in the *Purana,* Gonanda, vide verse number: 1025, asks Brihadashwa to tell him the names of the holy tirthas of the valley and the importance of visiting such tirthas. Immediately comes the answer from Brihadashwa that the tirtha of Vinayaka, the son of Ganga, the descendent of Vardhanadruma stands as the first and foremost tirtha worth adoration and veneration that brings all sorts of success and welfare at the very first sight of it. [2] The *Purana* also lays emphasis on the worship of Vinayaka on certain special occasions. While celebrating the Nava Samvatsara (Navareh), the 1st day of the Spring Navaratra, the devotees have been asked to visit the temples of Vinayaka particularly mentioning that the fourth day of the bright half of every month is most auspicious for such venerations. Although pilgrimage to the most holy places attributed to a number of other deities is also recommended at a number of places in the *Purana,* yet all these inclusions require to be understood with care as such accounts involve mingling of facts. At a few places the name of a single deity has been used in a plural form in the narration of the *Purana* [3]. The *Purana*, however, tells about the specific celebrations of the festival of Vinayaka and offering of sweetmeats to the deity on this occasion. It appears that our ancestors must have carried the details of this festival to the valley on their annual migration because the day/s and the month fixed for such celebrations at present differ from those mentioned in the chronicle. [4]

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[1] *Putratve Nandinam praadhaat sva Ghanesham Mahaabalam I*
Nilamata Pu.. v 1072 (a)

[2] For details Ps. *Nilamata Pu. Pt., II,.,*vs., 396, 626,724-26, 876,1026,1028. and 1072.

At present if we combine the words Vinayaka and Tso'ram with months, dates and days, it means the fourth day of the bright fortnight of Bhadrapada, i.e. September. The fourth day of Bhadra Shukla, is a 'Swayam Siddha Mahoorta,' 'an auspicious occasion in itself,' for the veneration of Vinayaka and it is also known as 'Vinayaka Tso'ram' or 'Vinayaka Chaturthi.' as already said. It is considered extremely auspicious in case it falls on a Sunday. In the Kashmiri Hindu families, a special kind of sweet bread fried in purified butter 'ghee', called 'Roth', is prepared on this date. Most of the people adhere to the fourth day of the said fortnight keeping the directive of the scriptures in view. However, in case it is not possible to adhere to this date, the preparation is postponed and held on a subsequent auspicious date, called, 'Pana' Sath', contained in the almanac and offerings are made to the deity. In case it is not possible for any Hindu family of the valley to make the offering during the said fortnight due to some unavoidable circumstances, the ritual is held on the bright fifteenth day of the month of 'Kartika'. This ritual is known as 'Pan Dyun'. Due to its long tradition, the function has taken the shape of a binding ritual and no body dares to offend the deity by discontinuing the offerings, instead addition of flour, etc., is made while preparing the sweet pancakes on the arrival of a new addition in the number of the family members. Besides, the month of September being a season of harvesting cotton in the valley, as such raw thread is prepared out of newly harvested cotton. The preparation of the thread from the newly harvested cotton has got a special significance at this function. This cotton is got spun by a young virgin girl called, 'Kanyak' and a portion of it is worn by the elderly lady of the house in her right ear ornament along with a new 'Ataho'r'. She keeps a fast on this day till the offerings of sweet pancakes are made to the deity. The girl, who spins the new cotton, is offered specially made small bread called, 'Kanyaka' Vor', a small 'sweet pancake'. In addition to this she is given some cash as gratification. During those days of self-sufficiency, the local cotton of the valley was ready for collection in the month of 'Bhadrapada: hence its first offering was made to the deity. Tough the cultivation of cotton has since long been discontinued in the valley due to the introduction of some other cash crops, but still the festival and the ritual is observed by the Hindus of this land as it was held centuries ago. The practice is still in vogue even after our exodus form the valley to different parts of the county and even abroad.

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[1] *Vinaayakah Kumaarashcha tathaiva cha Vinaayakaah* II
Nilamata Pu.,v., 626 (b).

[2] *Vinaayakam tu Gaangeyam nisritam vardhanadrumaat I*
Tam drishtwa sarva kalyaneem siddhim aaphnoti Maanavah II
*Ibid.,.,*v., 1026

[3] *Vinaayakagrihe yatraa chaturthyam samprashasyate I*
Kumaarasyagrihe shashthyam saftamyam Savitustatha II
Ibid., v., 876.

[4] *Jeshtyam tu samateetaayam ya dvijendra ashtamee bhawet I*
Tasyam Vinaayakah poojah sgano modakot kraih II
Ibid., v., 724

Most of our *Puranas,* especially the *Markandeya Purana* and the *Shiva Purana* specifically refer to the worship of Maha Shakti or Absolute Energy, in its various forms and names. The Shaiva Darshan of Kashmir confirms that the self born Eternal Energy, called, Samvit Shakti glorifies itself in Him (Shiva) and the Divine Energy 'Shakti' thus born, is the cause of trial, splendour and purification of the pure hearts.[1] This purification works as an axle that makes Param Shiva vibrant Shaiva Darshan of Kashmir confirms that the Absolute Param Shiva acts through it. With the passage of time our rites and rituals have given further currency to this thought and in this way the supremacy of Mother Worship seems to have got momentum in our remote past along with the concept of God or "Param Shiva". Perhaps, it is because of this very background that we also name this ritual as 'Veer Bhadrun Roth', or "Beeba Dharma Maji hinz tsot" or "Bhima Garbhun Roth", i.e. preparation of pancakes in honour of 'Veer Bhadra, the family deity or Mother Goddess. The word 'Bhima/Beeba' is directly derived from the root Sanskrit word, "Bhima" meaning the 'terrible' or the 'dreadful' and besides many other meanings, Shiva assumed the name of Bhima that represents his 'terrible' aspect while the other names indicate his benign forms as described in the *Nilamata.* [2] Our *Puranas, Shruti* and *Smritis,* including the *Markanday Purana*, the *Devi Mahatmya,* the *Indrakshi Satotra* and the *Durga Saptashati,* etc., name Goddess "Durga" as "*Bhima*" for She annihilated the Asuras. [3] Even *Bhawani* or *Gauri/ Parvati* is named as *Bhima* in Her one thousand names mentioned in various scriptures including the *Bhawani*

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[1] *Samvit: Swayam swenaiva prakaashena sattatam prakaashimaanaa, Swayameva cha swaathmavimarshanam vidashchati, Artha jaatam swathmani dhaarayantee, Tasyapi srshtyadhi bhumikaasu prakaashanam vimarshnam cha kurvatee shuddha chetana I*
Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Koshah, ,Pt. II., p. 721.

[2] *Bhimaakshya Bhusundaaya vyalayagnyopaveetine*
Nilamata Purana, v., 1138.

[3] *Varahi Naarsimhi cha Bhima Bairava Naadhini* I
Vijeshwar Jantri, by Dr. Manmohan Jyotshi, year 2010 p.19, v. 7.

Sahasranama.[1] In the *Vishnu Sahasranama*, Vishnu has been named as Bhima and in the same context it is further elucidated that He attained various incarnations to annihilate the Asuras.[2]

Actually the festival is held when the crop of wheat, one of our most common agricultural produces, is harvested in the valley of Kashmir. Now that the celebrations are connected with the worship of Gnesha/Vinayaka, the bestower of welfare, and the people are of the view that the origin of the words, "Beeba,(Kash) appears a derivation from the root Sanskrit word "Bhibha", also meaning the terrible, the frightful which is followed by the words "Garbha/Dharma" that are purely Sanskrit forms. Besides, "Bhima" and "Garbha", were considered to be the gods of agriculture of our ancient past, it is because of this very fact that a number of our religious scriptures contain the word Garbha suffixed to various gods and deities. To quote instances Hiranya Garbha and Bohuroopa Garbha are some of our famous religious texts. Durga, Ganesha, Parvati and other deities, gods and goddesses have also been suffixed with the word Garbha in our scriptures.[3] The Ganesh Sahasranama alone contains more than seventeen names with Garbha suffixed with one or the other form of the deity, Ganesha.[4]

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[1] *Abhiru Bhairavi Bhiraa Bhimaa Tripura Bhairavi* I
Sh. No 85 (A), p.22, *Aanand Bodh* special No: *Bhawani Sahasra - Nama*, year '95(March-June). Ed. By Dr Rajinder Panday and Sh T, N. Wanchoo, and Pub. by Jagdesh Narayan Kohli, N. Delhi, 92.

[2] *Atulah Sharbo Bhimah samayajnyo havir Hari* I
Sh. No 52 (A), p.16, *Aanand Bodh* special No: *Vishnu Sahasra - Naama*, year '94,(June- Sept.), Ed. By Dr Rajinder Panday and Sh T, N. Wanchoo, and Pub by Jagdesh Narayan Kohli, N., Delhi, 92. Also,
Janno janajanmaadih, Bhimo Bhima parakramah,
Ibid., p.36-37, Sh.No 114 (A).Also.
"*....Bhimaa Bhairava Naadini*" *Indrakshi Satotra.*

[3] *Khirudaje Kamala komala garbha Gauri,* I
Lakshmi prasida satataam namitaam sharanyam II
Devi-dhyana Ratnamala , Ed by, Pandit Keshav Bhat Jyotirvid, Year 1925, S. No:39 p.67

[4] S. No: 304 to320.,*Ganesh Sahasra Namawali*, Ed. By Sh. Ramesh Vithal Raghuvamshi for Shri Gajanan Book Depot. Publications Pune 30, Mumbai, 38.

There is a practice of narrating a folk tale with a happy ending, while performing this ritual. A few grains of soaked barley, rice and flowers wrapped in green grass runners (Dramun) are kept ready as one for each family member for an offering to the deity before the narration starts.[1]

The ritual starts with applying vermilion mark on the fore-head and tying of a wrist-band of "Na'rivan, on the wrist of each one of the family members. A statuette of Ganesha or goddess Lakshmi is worshipped on this occasion with devotion. Next the devotees take into their hands a handful of soaked rice, barley and flowers, tied in roots of green grass as already mentioned above. Every one waits to listen to the story most attentively. The narrator of the story starts his/her narration after repeated requests from all the members present. The listeners also encourage the narrator at intervals to show their interest in the story. The story is about a very prosperous general merchant who possessed all kind of wealth and a number of servants to tackle his variegated business. He had very little time for family duties. Contrary to this, his wife and his small baby girl deeply believed in their religion with its rituals, rites and age old customs. On one fine morning the Pan cakes were being prepared as per the "Veer Bhardrun Roth" ritual under the strict orders of his wife. He reached home in haste and paying a deaf ear to the repeated requests of the pious lady to wait for a few minutes for the completion of the ritual, he acted profanely and thus desecrated all arrangements made by the virtuous lady. The story precedes further to say that thus the curse of the deity fell on the whole family that shattered and devastated the whole family in a very short span of time. The ships carrying the merchandise of the arrogant husband sank in the sea along with the master and the whole property including the house-hold, both moveable and immoveable things were confiscated by the false and pretending creditors and the lady and her daughter were reduced to being daily wagers living on small wages given by their employers.

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[1] .In the *Nilamata Purana* (v 1026'a;) Vinayaka has been named as the descendent of Vardhanadruma, a grass that grows mostly near the wet lands. The Kashmiri word, 'Dramun' phonetically appears similar to the concluding portion of the word 'Druma' as contained in the *Nilamata* and it is especially associated with venerating the Vinayaka on this particular function. 'Drum' is a Sanskrit word meaning plant/tree and '...drumaat, means born from the particular 'plant/grass'.

After a long spell of time, the days of distress of the family changed when the small girl made a pancake made out of the corn weighing one and a quarter seer, she had gathered from the horse-dung in a stable where she worked as a stable cleaner. She washed, cleaned, dried and ground it into flour. She put the cake thus made in the furnace of a potter. She collected it on the next day and showed it to her mother, who was astonished to see that the cake had turned into a lump of pure gold. They purchased the necessary groceries from the local market and started the performance of the rite of Beeb Dharam Maaji Hunz Tsot on the next auspicious day. The father of the girl too returned from his voyage on the day of the ritual and the days of their misfortune ended there and then. The listeners repeat and wish that "Veer Bhadra" would make their life also prosperous likewise. All the members of the family pray together and they put the flowers, etc., in their hands into the "Kalsha" along with the idol of Ganesha/ Lakshmi after worshipping it. A full Roth is kept on the Kalasha and on it is placed a string of Na'ri'van and a piece of thread spun out from the new cotton. This pan cake and the Na'ri'van is presented to the Kanyak (small young girl) at the close of the ritual as her share. The piece of thread that was earlier worn by the elderly lady of the family is also put into the Kalasha.

A ritualistic prayer called the 'Pre'pyun' is offered on this occasion. 'Pre'pyun' is a combination of two words, 'Para' and 'Arpan' meaning to give to others, to offer or to present to others. It is a recitation from the Holy Scriptures which concludes with the sweet words, 'Please accept this "Naived" (the preparation thus made) like the "Nectar" which came into the possession of gods in ancient times at the time of the churning of the ocean 'Ksheer Sagara'. A full pancake and seven small pieces of the stuff are kept in a separate plate which we name as, 'tso't'. One out of the said small pieces, after worshipping it, is kept on the hearth or stove on which the pancakes have been prepared. Two pieces are put into the two small pots, preferably kept in the kitchen, called "Sanivari" (in case the practice of keeping such pots is continued in the family.) Otherwise these and the remaining small pieces of bread thus worshipped are offered to the deities and birds along with the full cake cut to pieces. The pancake and a 'Kanyaka' Vo'r', put on the "Kalasha" and the string of. 'Na'rivan', is offered to the young girl along with some monetary gratification. All those present in the house and those invited to attend the function get a pancake each as 'Naveed' or Naived - meaning the left-over of a ritualistic performance. The pancakes or portions thereof are distributed among all the neighbours and relatives. This function is repeated on a year-to-year basis according to the lunar calendar.

There are a few of the rituals in our yearly calendar that promote social contacts in addition to their being of religious value and background, when one had to make a contact with almost all ones relatives . The most important among these are:-

i. Distribution of walnuts after the *Shiva Ratri* festival held on the expiry of the cold season in the valley t, and
ii. Distribution of pancakes after the celebration of the "*Pan*" - a ritual of the harvest season.

In this connection it may be pointed out that one has to take into consideration the remote past of the valley when no means of communication or transportation were available to the people especially those involving long journeys. People generally remained confined within the four walls of their houses for all the severe winter months. The early man must have felt a great desire to enquire about the welfare or otherwise of his near and dear ones and he must have initiated visiting his friends and relatives on the expiry of the harsh winter months. Besides, enquiring about yeild of the year's crops, at the time of harvesting, our ancestors must have started visiting relatives and friends to enquire about their health and well being. For initiating such type of a journey, generally on foot, he must have chosen a few items of food which, besides being nutritive, were also locally available in abundance. Thus he would take some walnuts and bread, for such relatives. The same idea seems behind the "Pan" ritual. In order to enquire about the ripening or otherwise of the annual crop of rice (*Shaali*), he must have visited his near and dear ones with a present of pancakes as an indication of his own well-being. Thus the rituals that seem to us meaningless or confusing today, must have served the early man's one purpose or the other through generations.

6. *Janam Ashtami (Zarma' Satam)*

Lord Krishna's Birthday.

In fact there is a detailed description in the *Nilamata Purana* about the ceremonies to be held in connection with the birthday celebrations of Shri Krishna. The narration extends over twelve verses from 739 to 750. The *Purana* advocates adoption of special rites on the appearance of the Shravani, the concluding constellation through which the moon passes at the close of the month of Shravana, the fifth month of the Vikrami calendar. It directs the devotees to take a bath at the confluence of the Vitasta and the Sindhu rivers and then worship the bow-wielding god of the gods, Vishnu [1]. The scriptures and books on astrology confirm that Lord Krishna was born at the dead of night i. e., at the moon-rise on the eighth day of the dark half of the month of Bhadun, also known as 'Ba'deri' Pyath', the sixth month of the Hindu calendar known in Kashmir as Shubha Samvat which dates back 3019 years before the Vikrami Samvat and 3076 years older than the Christian era. Being a prince from the Yadava royal clan, Krishna was also named as Yadunandana.

Before commenting on the birth of Lord Krishna as is contained in the *Purana*, one has to keep in mind the impact of the Yadava dynasty on the political map of the sub-continent and its past relations with Kashmir. We should bear in mind that Gonand had assisted Jarasandha by taking part in a war against the Yadhavas much before the great war of Mahabharata. The *Purana* says that Lord Krishna was born on the date and time after the expiry of eighth most auspicious day of the dark fortnight of Bhadara, when the moon entered the Shravana constellation. Spending the whole day in the study of Bhagwat Katha, the devotees have been advised to take bath at that horal moment to gain all round prosperity for all times to come. [1] The date and the time of Lord Krishna's birth has more extensively been described in the *Nilamata Purana* than many other such documents discussing the birth details and life of Lord Krishna including the great epic, the Mahabharata as well. It is stated that Madhusudana also called Lord Krishna was born on the eighth day after the full moon night of Shravana at the end of the 28th year of Dvapara Yuga [2]. It further says, "Oh! Wise Brahman, it is learnt that He took birth in the land of Bharata so as to lessen the burden of sin from this land. On that particular date, the *Purana* goes on to say that the worship of gods and goddesses is to be performed by the devotees in the most proper and devote manner. Goddesses like Devaki and Yashoda are to be worshipped with scents and garlands [3]. Eatables like barley and wheat prepared in milk and fruits of all varieties should be offered to the gods and goddesses during that auspicious night. It further tells us that a big festival should be held before the sun rise next morning. Women in red garments (Kaustub) have been directed to take the images of all these holy gods and goddesses to a river or a lake banks singing accompanied by sweet sounds of the musical instruments. It is worthy to state here that, among other eatables, the *Purana* has used the word, "Marich" for "Chillies" and thus it puts aside the views of some scholars that the name of this spice in the Kashmiri language is a borrowed one. It is also advocated in the said verse that one should eat preparations made from barley, chillies and purified butter only on this date [1].

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[1] *Tatastu Shraavaneem praapya Vitastaa Sindhu Sangame* /
Snaatva sampoojanam karyam Deva devasya Shaaranginah //
Nilamata Pu., v., 739

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[1] *Shravanarksham anupraphte Chandramase atha Kaashyapa* I
Snaatasya Shravane pusshtih sarvaasmin sarvadaa bhavet II
Nilamata Pu.,., v.,742

[2] *Shraavanyam samateetaayam ya syath krishnaashtami* I
Tasyam utpadhyate Devo manushai Madhusudana II
Bhaaraavataarnaartham hi tasyantu dvijisattama I
Ashtavimshe tu sampraphte dvaaparante cha nah shrutam II
Ibid v., 743-44.

3. *Devakee cha Yashodaa cha tathaa poojye dvijotamma* I
Gandhair malyaistathaa bhakshair yava godhooma sambhavaih II
Ibid. v. 746

The day brings joy to all young and old. Having taken a bath early in the morning, the elderly people spend the day in fasting and praying. The young people too keep a fast and a number of preparations of cookies made from water-chestnut flour, fruit and milk are a special treat of the day. Beautiful swings are decorated in each house for swinging the portraits of Lord Krishna depicting his exploits. 'Krishna Autar Leela': and general 'Leela' songs are sung /played in all the homes for the whole day in the length and breadth of the valley. In the afternoon rallies and processions depicting tableaux of various exploits of Lord Krishna, are taken out in all the streets in the main tows and cities of the sub-continent including the valley of Kashmir in honour of the birthday of Lord Krishna, the protector of Dharma on this earth. Thousands of people participate in it or witness this procession which is locally called as 'Veeda' Bhagwan'.

The farmers of the valley have a special belief regarding this festival, They believe that the cold season starts on the return of the sages and saints after the pilgrimage to the famous cave shrine of Swami Amarnath Ji, on Shravana Poornima and the cold season matures by the eighth day of the dark half of the month of Bhadra, the birthday of Lord Krishna._In fact the advent of autumn season (Sharad Rittu) generally coincides with Janam Ashtami and the climate of the valley starts becoming colder from this date onwards and the farmers take to harvesting from this date onwards.

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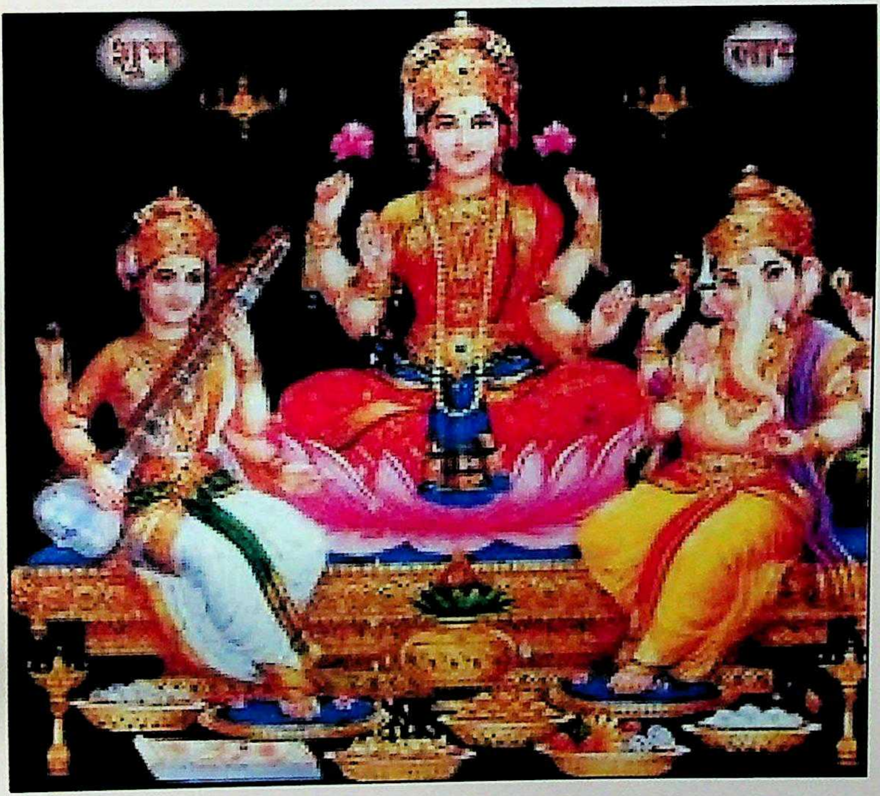
[1] *Tasminnahni bhokhtavyam`bhojanam yavasambhavam I*
Yuktha mikshu vikaaraishcha marichaishcha ghritena cha II
Nilamata Pu.,v.,750



Lakshmi Poojana Mandapa on Deepawali,

7. *DEEPAWALI*

The Festival of Lights

The word Deepawali is a combination of two words, 'Deep and Awali'. While 'Deep' means a lamp, 'Awali', stands for 'a row, a range, a series, a dynasty or linage, etc., and a number of modern Indian languages, including Kashmiri have rightly named the festival, 'Deepamala' - the festival of lamps and lights, celebrated all over India with great devotion and fanfare. The celebrations start much earlier when the people clean, whitewash and decorate their houses and other business establishments and give a new look to all their surroundings. Thus every thing in our close vicinity and environment is given a new look of our choice on this colourful occasion.

Many stories and myths are connected with the celebration of this festival through the length and breadth of this sub-continent but the main one is connected with one of our most ancient epics, the Ramayana. Strictly speaking, we celebrate the Vijayotsava or the festival of our 'victory' on the tenth day of the bright fortnight of Ashwin, commonly called Vijaya Dashmi after a number of celebrations, like the "Shravana Poornima" – a day attributed to the worship of "Shiva", the fountainhead of all happiness and bliss for the devotees, who is the source of bestowing infinite blessings to all His devotees. This is followed by our obeisance to Lord Ganesha on the eve of Vinayaka Chaturthi falling on the fourth day of the bright half of the month of Bhadra and then the ritualistic fortnight of "Pitri Paksha," a fifteen-day period devoted to our manes held during the dark half of the month of Ashvin. Last of all we bow before all powerful Mother Goddess during the nine days of "Navaratra" for the survival of the Truth. On "Vijaydashmi", Lord Ram eliminated Ravana, the demon king of Lanka, who had invited misfortune for himself by kidnapping Mata Sita, the spouse of Lord Ram when they were in exile. Though the news of the death of Ravana and victory of Lord Ram should have reached

Ayodhya much earlier but it took him (Ram) at least 20 days to return to Ayodhya along with all his near and dear ones after setting right the matters in Shri Lanka by installing Vibhishana on its throne as the new king.

The other Pauranic legend says that on this date Goddess Lakshmi emerged from the Ksheer Sagara after the Devas and the Danavas churned it. It is commonly known as Samudra Manthana and the Devas felt happy at the sight of Lakshmi and sang devotional songs in Her praise. Her emergence from the ocean was an occasion of celebrations and a celestial moment. Some consider the festival connected with the Narasimha Avatara described in the *Vishnu Purana*. The story goes that the Demon king Harinaksha also known as Hiranya Kashipa, was furious with Prehalada, his son, for having worshipped Goddess Lakshmi, the spouse of Lord Vishnu, on the night of the thirteenth day of the dark fortnight of Kartika, commonly known as "Dhanterasa". As recorded in *Vishnu Purana*, Harinaksha, in order to get rid of his son, asked him (Prehalada) to embrace a red hot iron pillar at the main gate of the palace. He also directed him to invite his saviour, Vishnu to save him (Prehalada) from death. As soon as Prehalada embraced the hot iron pillar under father's compulsion, the hot pillar broke into two pieces vertically and Vishnu is said to have emerged from it in the form of Narasimha, a human being with a loin's head who killed the arrogant Harinakasha and thus saved Prehalada, the God-fearing devotee, from the wrath of his wicked father.[1] The followers of Sikhism also celebrate this day as one of their auspicious days when Guru Hargovind Singh Ji, the Sixth Guru, freed himself and his fifty one followers, who were the princes of the hilly states of the Northern Himalayan regions of the sub-continent, from the prison of the Mughal Emperor,

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[1] The narration includes that Harinakasha had got a boon from Brahma to the effect that no human being. not even a deity, Rakshasa or animal could kill him either inside the house or outside of it with any kind of weapon. Thus Hari took the form of Narasinha (half beast and half human) to kill the arrogant Asura on the gate-pillar of the Palace and scratched his body by the nails of his paws.
(*Vishnu Puran*)

Jehangir, and thus upheld the high traditions of valour. The great seer of India, Swami Dayanand Sarasvati is also said to have attained Nirvana on the auspicious day of Deepawali.

In this way the description of the Deepawali festival has existed in a number of our ancient scriptures that include the great epics and our *Puranas,* etc. Our local *Purana,* the *Nilamata*, has named this festival as *Deepamala, Deepawali* and *Sukha Suphtika*. The *Purana* has named this festival also as the *Kaumadi Mahostava* ' a festival that gives bliss' and has asked the devotees to light a lamp on every evening and place it out side ones home for a complete one month till the advent of the full moon night of Kartika. [1] The celebrations as per the *Nilamata Purana* on the occasion of Deepawali festival are:

1. Fasting during the day time on Kartika Amavasya by all excepting the sick and the children;
2. Worship of *Kareeshinee (Lakshmi*) to be started just after the sun-set in the evening;
3. Decorating the temples, road-crossings, cremation grounds, rivers, hills, houses, the grounds surrounded by trees, cow-sheds, courtyards and shops, nearby trees etc., with rows of lamps. [2]

The narration contains a special process for the decoration of shops and financial establishments owned by the affluent people of the society. The devotees taking part in the celebrations have been directed to decorate all the shops with a variety of new cloth and then the main entrance and the inner space is to be decorated with colourful cloth and with rows of earthen lamps in the evening. Well adorned and dressed in new clothes, the devotees have been asked to feast in the company of their all family members including friends, relatives, Brahmins, and servants. The Purana further says that the devotees should spend the whole night in singing, dancing, gambling and hearing vocal music.[1] The other celebrations to be held on the next day of the Deepmala i.e. on the 1st day of the bright half of Kartika are given below:

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[1] *Raatrau deepashcha daatavyo maasekam bahir grihaat I*
Yavat kaartikamaasasya paurnamaaseem dvijottama II
Eshaa tu Kaumadee naama tithih kaarya Shiva pradaa I
Nilamata Pu., vv. 409, 410 (a).

[2] *Tasyam divaa na bokhtavyam baalaaturjanam vinaa II*
Surye tu astam anupraaphte poojayitva Kareeshineem I
Deepa vriksha tato deya devataayataneshucha II
Chatushpatha shamshaaneshu nadee parvata veshmasu I
Vriksha muleshu goshtheshu chatvareshuvaapaneshu cha II
Ibid.,vv., 411(b), 412-13.

1. Gambling and listening to vocal music, that makes the year very auspicious for those who win in gambling [2].
2. Decoration of bedrooms and beds with lamps incense, perfumes, a variety of new cloth, jewels and spending the night in the company of one's family [3].
3. Honouring; friends and relatives by marriage and matrimonial alliances, Brahmins and servants in a proper manner with gifts of new clothes.[4]

The detailed and minute description of the festival contained the *Purana* indicates the importance and the reverence with which the festival was celebrated in the valley since ancient times.

Throughout the whole country, people, big or small, poor or rich, young or old, celebrate the occasion with pomp and show. All look fresh and joyful. Sweets and fried pancakes are distributed in every house. In the evening walls, windows and doors, roof-tops of houses are decorated with lamps; lamp-pillars. People worship Mother Goddess, Maha Lakshmi with flowers, pancakes and sweets, and distribute these among all their near and dear ones as an oblation. Businessmen open new account books of their establishments on this date. In the evening the young ones display fireworks and burst fire-crackers.

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[1] *Vastraishcha vaapanaah sarve kartavya dvija shobhitaah I*
Deepamaalaa parikshipte praveshe tadanantaram II
Sva alankritena bhoktavyam dvijendra navavaasasaa I
Suhridbhirbadhubhih saartham Brahmanaishchaanuyayibhih II
Kreedatavyam tadaa dyootaih shrotavam geetavaaditam II
Nilamata Pu, vv., 414-15, and 416(b).

[2] *Tatah praaphte dviteeyeahni svanuliphtai svalankritaih I*
Kreedatavyam tadaa dhyutaih shrotavyam geeta vaadhitam I I
Tasmin dyute jayo yasya tasys samvatsarah shubhah II
Ibid. vv., 416, 417 (b).

[3] *Tasyam raatryam tu kartavyam shayyasthaanam sushobhitam I*
Gandhair vastraistathaa dhupai ratnaishchaivaabhilankritam II
Deepamaalaa parikshiptam tathaa dhupena dhupitam I
Dayitaabhishcha sahitairneyaa saa cha nishaa bhaveth II
Ibid.,vv., 418-19

[4] *Navaishcha vastraih pujyashcha suhrit sambandhibaandhavah I*
[illegible] Chandradeva yathaa vidhi II
Ibid., v. 420.

The devotees throng the temples of Mother Goddess Lakshmi from early morning. In the valley of Kashmir it is considered as the beginning of the cold winter season whereas it is the end of the hot summer season in the plains of the sub-continent.

8. Matrika Poojana

Manjhor Ta'ha'r

The lexical meaning of Samvatsara is a period or a time- gap of one year. Our astrological calculations indicate that like most of the parts of our globe, our sub-continent (Bharatvarsha) came into existence on the first day of Chaitra Shokla, and we particularly celebrate this day as the New Year's Day. But in the case of the valley of Kashmir we have two days connected with this unique natural phenomenon. One is the Samvatsara (Navreh) celebrated on the 1st day of Chaitra Shokla ,(Amananta) when this globe or a part of it, is supposed to have come into existence and we celebrate it as the New Year's Day. The other is the day when the water of the Satisara was drained out with the efforts of Kashyapa Rishi, (at the end of Kartika Poornamashi), on the first day of the dark half of 'Marghashirsha Krishna Paksha' (Poornimanta) and the valley of Kashmir emerged. Thus we have been celebrating two Samvatsaras in the valley of Kashmir from the times immemorial. The one is the Poornimanta that falls just on the next day of Kartika Pooranashi or on the 1st day of the dark half of the month of Marghashirsha and is called as Nava Samvatsara, the day when the progeny of Kashyapa settled in the valley after its water was drained out. The people of Kashmir being more inclined towards religion, gods and deities, the *Nilamata Purana* advocates a number of celebrations on account of the Nava Samvatsara and names it as, Kaumadi Mahotsava The other one is Amananta and is observed on the 1st day of the bright half of Chaitra just on the next day of Chaitra Amavasya and we call it Samvatsara or the New Year's Day as it is also observed in almost all other parts of the sub-continent. [1] On this day all people, well dressed, have been directed to celebrate the day in a cheerful manner and well-fed and well anointed people have been asked to celebrate it in the company of good people of happy minds. Listening to vocal music, wishing for the better future for all and wearing of new clothes, are the common celebrations of this day. Those who are given to drinking have been allowed to drink on this cheerful occasion as per the *Nilamata Purana*.[1]

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[1] *Kaartikayam samateetaayam sampraaphte prathmeahni I*
Kashmiraa nirmitaa purvam Kashyapena mahaatmana II
Nilamata Pu., v., 465.

Lakshmidhar, the author of the *Kritya Kalpataru*, (12th century A.D.), while quoting from some earlier *Brahmpurana*, has confirmed that the people of the valley observed this day as Samvatsara and this *Purana*, which has recently been found, includes all the celebrations as described in the *Nilamata*.[2]

Like most of the parts of our country, the people of Kashmir, the land of gods, deities and Rishis, believe from ancient times that there is a deity in charge of each house they live in and name him as, 'Griha-devata' or Gara Diva'ta'. In order to please him, a number of offerings are made to him according to the family beliefs, customs and traditions on this particular festival. Some people make offerings of rice and fish during the dark fortnight of "Posha' on any Tuesday or Saturday of the said fortnight of the month. By taking into account the paraphernalia associated with celebrating the occasion, one can easily say that the ritual appears to have been entrusted to us by the Pishachas, the aboriginals of the valley, who allowed the recently arrived group of the Aryana to stay in their home land for the full year after agreeing to observe certain peculiar rites and rituals.

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[1] *Tasmaattatra dine kaaryam utsavam sarva maanavai I*
Shrotavyam geetavaadhyam cha tathaa sevyam cha mangalam I
Paanam cha paanapaih peyam vastram dhaaryam tatha navam II
Nilamata Pu., vv., 466(a), 467.

[2] *Brahmpurane, Maargasheersha maasasyaarambhe pratipadhyapi,*
Navasamvatsaraarambho Deva kritayuge kritah I
Kashyapena cha Kaashmiraa nirmitaahshcha sushobhanah I
Tasmaattatra naraih kaaryah sadda punya mahotsavah I
Pushpair maalair geetavaadyair manglair drishti shobhitaih I
Paanairanairstatha vastrair upayukhtair naraistatha II
Kritya Kalpataru R.N. Temple MSS Library, Jammu; No,2684, folio 114 (b)

The preparations for the function start from early in the morning. Every body must be chaste, neat and clean on this day. Ladies take utmost care in taking a bath and remain clean and chaste on this day. The whole house is swept clean. The particular place where the offerings for the deity are placed, (generally on the second or third floor of the house), is neatly besmeared with brown clay and water. Cooked rice and fish is offered to the deity. Some people offer a raw fish as well while others don't allow even their close relatives to stay in their house on this particular night. In the evening offerings are placed for the deity on the clean and selected place. An earthen lamp is lit and kept beside the plate containing the offerings and all the contents and the lamp are covered with a willow basket. After paying obeisance, all the family members take the remaining food as an oblation. A number of stories about miracles done by the deity are prevalent among different families including those who either make such offerings to their 'Griha Devata'(Gara' Diva'ta) or do not follow such a ritual. Next morning the contents of the plate are offered to the birds while others take it as an oblation from the deity.

The veneration of the Griha Devata has been advocated by the author of the *Nilamata* at a later stage in the Purana while propounding the worship on the occasion of celebrating the festival of Samvatsara. On this day the wise have been advised to make balls of cooked rice and offer them to the deity of the house and the eagles on the beginning of this day. The *Purana* strictly forbids preparing the said food-balls outside the house or placing them under a tree outside the house.[1] The verse 528 of the *Purana* contains a single line and it appears that the chronicler has concluded the fifty sixth Adhyaya of the *Purana* regarding the worship of Griha Devi/ Devata Poojana here on this single line. Now that the Nava Samvatsara (Pooranimanta) of Kartika is held on the first day of the dark half of Marghashirsha, it appears that the festival of

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[1] *Evameva pradaatavyam Grihadeyva vichakhshinaih I*
Brahman Samvatsarasyaadau shyena pindam vivarjitam II
Tatchadeyam grihe vipra na tu vrikshe kadaachanah II
— *Nilamata Pu.*, vv., 827-28.

'Matrika Poojana', apparently seems to be an aboriginal festival, connected with farming and harvesting. It appears that with the passage of time, the celebrations connected with both these festivals have been intermingled and have finally been shifted to the first day of the dark half of Pausha (also Pooranimanta). Besides all these changes, some people celebrate this festival and prepare rice in the turmeric water, called 'Tahar' which is offered to the deity of the house, taking a portion of it to the fields after the completion of harvesting, and to the cremation ground as well, according to ones individual family traditions. It appears that with the passage of time the festival seems to have changed patterns a number of times while celebrating it. The last change in offering vegetarian food stuff to the deity appears to be a recent one that has been added under the influence of the Vaishnavite order.

At the initial stage, the word Matrika Poojana must have been a ritual held with utmost care and reverence. According to the Shaivite philosophy of Kashmir, the word "Matrika" is a Tantrik combination of the seven goddesses, like, Brahmi, Mahishowari, Kaumari, Vaishanavi, Varahi, Indrani and Chamunda. Kashmir being the highest seat of Shaivite learning, the importance of all these goddesses is but natural. All of these goddesses are considered as the creation or the Supreme Power of one ultimate Mother Goddess, and are named as "Diva'tsa' ". With the passage of time the word, "Matrika" lost its ancient essence and it attained a different meaning in the higher circles or to be more precise in the political circles though it retained its old flavour in the ritualistic performances. The Matrika Chakra became the decoration of the gates of the sovereign kings depicting their gateways and boundaries.[1] During a later period the word, "Matrika" was used for a court girl /dancer or for a dancing girl in general and such characters attained supreme powers in the courts of some of our famous kings and they even decided the future kings of the valley of Kashmir and such of their treacherous actions have been named as Matrika Chara by Kalhana, in his *Rajatarangini* [1].It may not be out of place to mention here that in the common Kashmiri language we call the ladies of our house as 'Matrica' on all social gatherings and religious functions.

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[1] *Raajatarangini* by Kalhana, Book I. vv., 122,335, 348, III.v., 99; and V., v.,55.

While discussing the present usage and celebrations of the word mentioned above, it is pertinent to say that the usage of the term is now solely shrinking and is now confined to some of the rural area of Kashmir. Earlier every farmer spent the full month of Kartika in harvesting the crop and then cleaning and storing it properly. In the following month he pounded as much of it as was required by him for the winter that extended over a period of more than four months in the valley. He had to make provision for his cattle and other animal and for this purpose he stored the feed etc., for them also for this period. By the end of the month of Magar or Margashirsha he was completely free from all this labour. On the concluding day of Magar or on the first of Poh he prepared with utmost devotion, salted rice cooked in turmeric so as to pay oblation to the deity associated with the fields where he worked for all these months and he named it as, Manjho'r Taha'r. However, at present the selection of place for the oblation for the deity differs according to one's family traditions. Generally on this day the devotees living in the far flung villages of the valley rise up early in the morning and make a present of such an oblation to their deities at the cremation ground known as 'Razabal'. After paying salutations to the deity there, they visit their fields along with their family members and offer a share of this oblation to the deity of their fields by placing a part of this yellow cooked rice on one of their boundaries. The remaining portion is offered to all those who accompany them or are present at the field at that time.

Coming more close to the Vaishnavaite cult of the sub-continent, it is felt that the progeny of Kashyapa have remained more close to their brethren while keeping themselves in their association during the period of four Manvantaras of their yearly migration from the valley as per the curse from Kashyapa as contained at the outset of the *Nilamata Purana*. Thus, it is presumed that they must have given a Vaishnavaite order to some of their newly adopted rites and rituals while living in their company besides, adopting a few of the customs and festivals of the Pishacha order. There is no denying the fact that the Mother Goddess worship of the valley had a great impact on them that they observed the ritual as Matrika Poojana which is held on the 1st day of the dark half of Pausha on the conclusion of the month of Margashirsha. Some Kashmiri Hindu families offer sweet-rice pudding to the seven goddesses mentioned above and this ritual is known to this date as 'Divatsa Khir./ Kheer" It appears that though a few Kashmiri Pandit families now hold this ritual on a horal moment and on an auspicious day, but previously the concluding day of Margashirsha of every year must have remained a fixed date for holding the function. Seven small girls 'Kanyas' and a boy (representing Shiva/Vishnu) are venerated on the occasion. The word 'Divatsa' appears a direct derivation from the Hindi word 'Deviyan' the pluralistic form of 'Devi' adopted by the Kashmiri language and represent the seven forms of the goddess Durga, the Mother Goddess. This ritual is held by the Kashmiri Pandit families according to their individual family custom. Some people arrange a Havan on this occasion. The feet and hands of all the invited children are washed by the devotees, vermilion paste is applied on their fore-heads and Na'rivan, the sacred wrist band, is tied to their wrists. They are worshipped with flowers and offered some cash payment as 'Dakshina'. A towel or a hanky, a bowl of sweet-rice pudding, 'Kheer (Khir') and a spoon, etc., are also gifted to each of them on the occasion.[1] In this way this colourful ritual is celebrated in a number of ways by the Hindus of the valley annually.

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[1] . *Raajatarangini* by Kalhana, Book, VII. vv., 1460-62.

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[1] For more details please see *Kashmir Hindu Sanskar (Rituals, Rites and customs) –A Study* by S. N. Pandit, Year, 2006 pp. 98-107.

9. *Khe'tsi Mavas*

Oblation to Yaksha, Kubera

The fifteenth day of the dark half of the month of 'Pausha' is known as 'Khe'tsi/Khytsri Mavas'. The ritual is performed by the Kashmiri Pandits from very ancient times. The celebrations of this late night ritual lead us to the settlement of the Aryans in the valley under the guidance of Kashyapa Rishi when the Pishachas, the Yakshas, the Nagas and others who inhabited this valley. Naturally, they did not treat the newly arrived people well. A compromise was made under the directions of Nila Naga, the son of Kashyapa, who, after paying due respect to Hrishikesha-Hari, in the presence of Parashara Rishi, son of Maharshi Vasishtha, an ancient saint who is said to have streamlined the ancient Indian law. Accordingly, as it is contained in the *Nilamata Purana*, that the newly settled batch of the Aryan tribe was directed to follow some of the practices of their predecessors so as to live in the valley amicably [1]. Among others one such ritual appears to be 'Khytsri Mavas' held on the fifteenth day of the dark fortnight of the month of Pausha.[2] Actually this appears to be a festival that enabled the newly arrived Aryan settlers from the Indian sub-continent under the command of Kashyapa, to live amicably in piece with the native dwellers of the valley, like the Nagas, the Yakshas and the Pishachas. Besides, it was an entrance test for the new settlers to learn the doctrine of leading a peaceful life of co-existence in the company of the aboriginals. Bamzai, P.N.K., confirms that, according to the legend, as mentioned in the *Rajatarangini* and the *Nilamata Purana*, the Valley which was a vast mountain lake, was drained by Kashyapa Rishi who brought in Brahmins and sages from India to live here. In those pre-historic days the hilly tribes called the

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[1] *Nilah:*
Pranipatya Hrishikesham Paraasharam gurum Harim I
Kashmiraayam vastyartham vakshiyami aacharnam tava II
Nilamata Pu, v. 387.

[2] *Poojaneeyo Nikumbastu Pishaachaadhipatirbalee I*
Pishaachaanaaṁ cha daatavya balayascha susanskritah II,
Ibid., v,577

Pishachas and the Yakshas lived in the company of the Nags on the hilly terrains in remote mountain corners adjacent to the Sarah, (the lake). Now that the draining of water of the Sarah resulted in the appearance of the dry land of the valley and coming of the new settlers posed a threat to the native dwellers so they started troubling the new settlers even though they off and on offered food and clothing to these tribal people. Nila, the lord of the Nagas, advised these migratory Aryans through Chandradeva to observe some of the rites, rituals and festivals of the aboriginals so as to live amicably with them. The festival of Khe'tsi Mavas appears to be one of the said festivals still observed by Kashmiri Hindus on the 15th day of the dark fortnight of Pausha (Dec- Jan) when the hotchpotch (Khya'tsr} is cocked in every house and kept outside the house in a new earthen plate as an obligation to the and Yaksha [1]. It has further been elucidated that in this way the immigrants adopted a number of rituals of the Pishachas and Yakshas and thus they were allowed to continue their stay in the valley and live in peace.[2] *Rajatarangini* also repeats a similar story during the reign of Abhimanyu I (c.1200,B.C). It records that during the reign of the said king it snowed continuously and the whole valley experienced heavy snow storms. It is further narrated that, "There manifested itself some miraculous power through which the Brahmins, who offered oblations and sacrifices, escaped destruction, while the Bauddhas perished." [3]

A number of *Puranas* have made a mention of Kubera, the guardian of the treasure of gods, as Yaksha Raja. The *Padma Purana* and the *Harivamsha* contain that before the advent of Prathu, the sixth king from the Surya Vamsha dynasty, the earth had been milked by the Nagas, the Rakshasas, the Asuras, the Danavas and the Yakshas [4]

While discussing various kingly states of Bharatvarsha, the Mahabharata, (cant IX, vv., 1232, 1239-41) has described the existence of many such princely Naga states in the hilly areas of the sub-continent. It further describes that, "Oh King ! The number of the kings who flourished from the Yakshas, the Rakshasas, the Pishachas and many other such tribal people, is in thousands, who have attained the position of kings, Siddhas and Yogis by the grace of Shiva in the pious land of Sarasvati. [1]. The *Vayu Purana* contaiuns that the Pishachas, the Yakhshas, the Gandarvas, etc., had built beautiful palaces at a number of places matching the palace of Kubera (Alka Puri) [2]. The *Matsya* and the *Brahmanda Puranas* also mention that the Rakshasas, Pishachas and Yakshas are all dwellers of the Himalayas. [3] The *Nilamata Purana*, confirms Kubera as the king of Yakshas and Pishachas [4] The very fact that the *Nilamata Purana* has named Kubera as Vaishravana and Dhanada in its narrations that clearly confirms the importance the deity had attained in the society. [5] The *Nilamata* clearly states that Nagas born from Kadru, are the progeny of *Prajapati Kashyapa*, and *Nila* addresses *Kashyapa* as 'Father' in the *Nilamata.* [6]

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[1] Bamzai, P.N.K, *A History of Kashmir*, 2nd. Ed. Year,1973, pages, 16-17

[2] Ibid, P. 73

[3] *Rajatarangini*, by Kalhana, Book, I. v., 181

[4] .*Padma Pu., Bhumikanda* Ch., 28 v. 45 fn. (contd. on p. 158)
Harivamsha, I. 7,26-27. (The word, "*dogdha*' means ' a person who milks a cow ' but here it has been used in the sense of a king who reaps the fruit on the earth while ruling his kingdom.

With the advent of the winter season in the valley, the importance of the Yakshas increased with the arrival of the Pishacha Chief Nikumbha along with his five carore followers. He previously lived in peace for six months of winter in the valley of Himachal after subduing and annihilating the arrogant Pishachas living in the of Sea of Sand. On the advice of Kashyapa, they had agreed before Nila to worship the Nagas in whose territory they lived and had also promised to follow the customs, rites and rituals that the tribe had been following so as to prosper and flourish in the new settlement [1]. Now that the Pishachas, who, with the favour of Kubera, were to live henceforth with the Nagas for six months of the winter season and return to the Sea of Sand for the summer months, were asked to arrive in the valley on the bright fifteenth day of Aashvayuji every year in the company of the Pishacha Chief Nikumbha [2] As a result, the Aryans had to leave the valley for the winter for they had declined to live in the company of the Pishachas during winter months. After the expiry of four icons, the territory of Himachal was restored to Nikumbha for his winter retreat and men lived in the company of Nagas for the whole year though the arrival of the Pishachas, loyal to the Nag king, living in remote areas, continued to show their presence. As a result of this the observance of feasts and festivals also under went a change. The *Purana,* besides mentioning a number of festivals of social importance like the welcoming the First Snow Fall as "Nava Hima Pata Utsava", and drinking of fresh wine on such occasions, naming it as "Nava Madhya Panam",[3] it advocates that the following festivals be held during the dark fortnight of the month of Pausha :

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[1] *Yakshaascha Raakshasaacha Pishaashaach vishaampaeei I*
Ete chaanye cha bahavo Yogasiddhah sahasrashah I
Tasmin tirthe Sarasvatyah Shive punya parantapa II
Mahabharata, IX,vs., 2849-50.

[2] *Pishaachake girivarehramyam praasaadamanditam I*
Yaksha Gandarva charitam Kubera bhavanam mahat II
Vayu Pu., C., 39., v., 57

[3] *Rakshah Pishachaa Yakshaashch sarve Haimavataastu te I*
Matsya Pu., c., 114., 82

[4] *Teshaaṁ tu nigrahaarthaaye Pishaachaadhipatir balee II*
Nikumbho naama dharmaatmaa Kuberena tu yojitah II
Nilamata Pu., 211 (b), 212 (a).

[5] Ibid., vv. 1364 and 1391.

[6] *Evam ukhtah tadaa Nila pittram praaha dhaarmikah* I
Ibid, v. 219 (A).

1. Ashtaka Trayam: Performance of Shraaddha in memory of the departed males is to be held on the eighth and that of the deceased females is to be held on the ninth day of the dark half of the month of Pausha [4]. Males have also been advised to remain chaste for the night following the said Shraaddhas.

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[1] *Naagasya yasya ye sthaane nivasishanti maanavaah I*
Te tam sampoojiyanti pushpa dhoopaanulepanaih II
Tvayokhtam cha sadaachaaram paalayishanti ye naraah I
Teasmin deshe bhavishyanti pashu dhaanya samanvitaah II
Nilamata Pu., v. 223, 225.

[2] *Nikumbah punaraayati panchakotisamo balee I*
Shoklaashvayujpanchadashyam ntyam devaprasaadatah II
Himaachle tu shanmaasaan sa sadaa vaste sukhee I
Adhya prabhuiti shanmaasaamstasyeh vastirmayaa II Ibid .,vv., 216-17.

[3] *Visheshavat cha bhoktavyam bhojanam cha yathechikam I*
Navo madhyastu paatavyo madhyapaih patite hime II
Ibid.v v., 481.

[4] *Paushakrishna Ashtameem kaaryam shraaddham shaakai dvijottama I*
Apoopaih kaaryeth shraaddham nityameva samaahitah I
Navameeshu cha tasyeva streenam shraaddham tu kaarayeth II
Shraaddham kritva [illegible] brahmachaaree vaseth nishaam I
Ibid.,vv., 485 (a), 486, 487 (a).

2. Pushya Snana: Next, the male members in each family are directed to bathe from vessels containing fresh water and a number of medicinal herbs and then worship Narayana and other gods, each one separately, with this water and honour them with garlands, eatables and other offerings. They have been advised to perform sacrifices and give alms to Brahmins. The astrologers too are honoured and given silken clothes as special gifts on the eve of Pausha Puranmashi. In this way the *Purana* emphasises veneration of gods and deities and impresses upon the devotees that such acts bestow good health, wealth, prosperity, bumper harvest and procurement of good grains. Such practices, the *Purana* records, also eliminate the sins of the devotees. [1] The *Purana* has also contains that the devotees should massage their bodies with white mustard oil and purified butter and then bathe with medicinal water and worship various gods, goddesses, deities and honour Brahmins with money, food and other presents. [2]

3. Celebrations on the day of Uttarayana North declination of the sun begins on the 21/22nd of December every year and this date generally falls just close to the dark fifteenth day of Pausha. The *Purana* advises the people to bathe Madhsudana with purified butter according to ones means on this particular occasion. However, the followers of Hara have been directed to bathe Hara (Shiva) also on this occasion. The celebrations include giving of fuel to Brahmins and fodder for their cows. The *Purana* confirms that the devotees will be able to conquer their enemies and acquire beauty and luster with the observance of these rites.[3]

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[1] *Evam kritwa narah pushtim praaphnoti dhanadhaanyatah I*
Snaanam evam vidhaanena kartavyam paapanaashanam II
Nilamata Pu ., v., 493.

[2] *Gaura sarshapa kalkena tadaatootsaadito narah I*
Ghritena snaapanam kuryat swashareerasya maanavah II
Tato virookshitah snaatah sarvoushidhiyutair ghataih I
Mantrais tatokhtavai Daivatai kritva Agni havanam dvija II
Ibid., vv., 488,489 (a), 490 (b).

[3] *Ghritena snaapayed devam swashakthya Madhusudanam I*
Hara bhakhto Haram devam yatha syad Uttaraayanam II
Brahmaneshu cha daatavyam indhanam shaktitastathaa I
Trinam dadyad gvaamarthe yathaashaktya dvijaatishu II
Evamyah kurute smyak sa ripoon adhitishthati I
Ibid., vv., 494,497,498(A).

It is a busy day for the children because they are generally fond of hotchpotch food prepared on the occasion. Cleaning of utensils and besmearing and washing of the kitchen is done from early morning. Whole un-split lentil 'Moong' is also kept for sprouting. In the evening the hotchpotch is prepared with utmost care and sanctity. Some people prepare non-vegetarian hotchpotch on this occasion according to their family traditions. But the use of pickles of different varieties and uncooked radish is a common addition to cherish the hotchpotch. The oblation is put for the Yaksha (Kubera) in an earthen plate that is kept at a place outside the house preferably on the boundary wall of the compound. A red dried chili, a few pieces of radish and a little pickle is put on it according to the family customs and traditions. Some people prepare vegetarian hotchpotch (rice and black beans cooked together) for the cattle if there are any in that house. The Pishacha Bali (offering) thus prepared, is venerated as per the Naived Mantra. After its veneration, the offering is presented to the Yaksha, and to the domestic animal (if any), along with a few pieces of radish. The remaining hotchpotch is taken by the members of the family along with pieces of radish and pickles. It is a common belief that the Yakshas, the attendants employed to guard the gardens and treasures of Kubera, who is also considered to be in-charge of the treasures owned by gods, are set free from this day onwards up to the 'Tila Ashtami', the eighth day of the bright half of the month of 'Phalguna.' And it is also believed that they come down from the mountains and roam freely in the lower regions of the valley with a complete sway over the whole valley from this day onwards till their final retreat to the mountains in the month of Phalguna.[1]

The festivals of such nature have been adhered to by the Kashmiri Hindus from the ancient times and these have made the life of common man more colourful and charming through all these centuries. Besides, such festivals involve very less additional financial burden while promoting change of diet.

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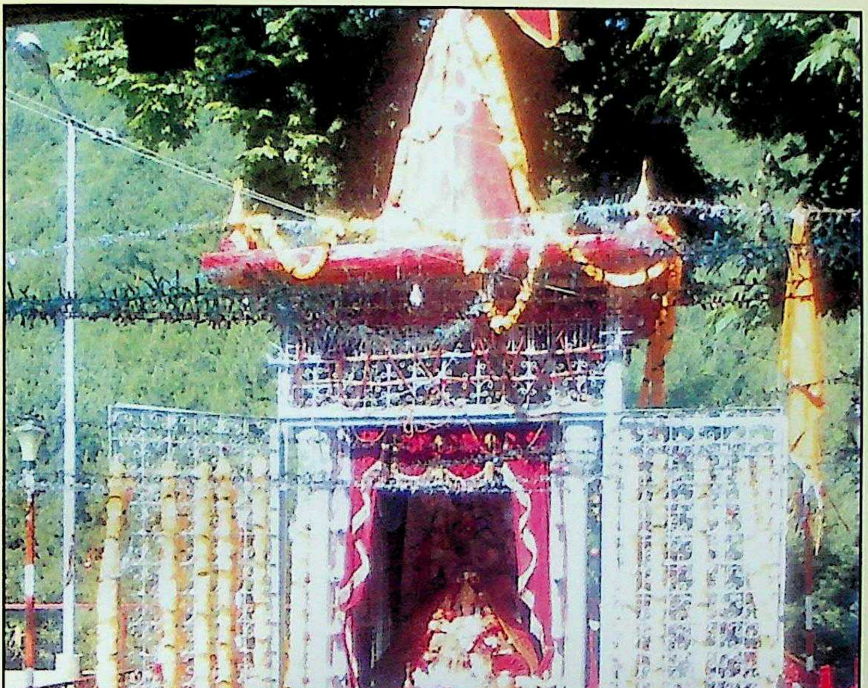
[1] For details please see *Kashmir Hindu Sanskars,(Rituals, Rites and Customs)* by S.N. Pandit, Year 2006, P., 364-65.



Temple of Tripura/Zyeshta at Zeethi'ya'r, Srinagar

10. MAGHA

(The month of Austerity)

The month of Magha starts from the day the sun enters the constellation Capricorn – commonly known as "Shishar/ Makkar Sankranti by Kashmiri Pandits like their counterparts living in most of the other parts of the sub-continent. The whole month of Magha, according to the lunar calendar, is considered as the holiest of all the twelve months of the year. Most of the people observe fast for the whole month starting from the first day of the dark fortnight. The observance of these fasts is called "Magh darun". The mode of fasting is observed from the 1st day of Magha as "Daham" - a day of a single cereal meal, "Kah" - a day of no cereal meal and "Bah", - again a day of a single cereal meal. Some people refrain from cutting their hair and also do not shave their beard for the full month. In fact the whole month is full of certain ritual practices and a few of such occasions of the month invite a special reference particularly when such reference have the religious backing of our *Puranas* especially the *Nilamata Purana,* which is considered, among a number of other such books, as a store house of the religion, culture, rites and rituals of our ancient past. The Purana especially mentions holding of some of the rituals on the following two days of the month:

(1) Tiladvadashi, It occurs after the expiry of the full moon fortnight of the month of Pausha, [1]; and

(2) Tara Ratri or Shiva Chaturdashi, falling on the fourteenth day of the dark half of Magha that invites bathing with fresh water in a number of rivers flowing through different parts of the valley. [2]

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[1] *Poushaayam to samateetaayam krishna ya dwadashee bhavet I*
Tsyamuposhitah snaatastilair datwa tilodhakam II
Kritwa tilaishcha naivedhyam tilair homam tathaiva cha I
Tilaashcha deya vipreshu sarva paapaapanuttaya II
Nilamata Purana, vv., 499, 500.

[2] *Tasya to anantaram Brahman ya syat krishna chaturdashee I*
Anarkaabhyudite kaale snaatavyam sheetale jale II
Ibid., v. 501

The *Purana* contains a list of ritualistic activities that follow the bathing ceremony on the Shiva Chaturdashi day. These include offering of seven handfuls of water to Yama and his associates, worship of Dharmaraja with food grains and pulses and worship of fire with sesame and purified butter so as to free ones own self from all minor sins. The dark fortnight of the month of Magha is also considered to be of great importance in case it is conjunct with Shravana constellation (Nakshetra).

It is followed with the celebrations connected with the bright fortnight of the month of Magha. On the 1st four days of the fortnight all have been directed to worship Uma with lamps, flowers, grains, sugar, salt, saffron and incenses etc. in general but women have been directed to observe in this manner the fourth day of the fortnight in particular. Women, who are devoted to their husbands and his sisters, are to be given special treatment on this day and they are honoured likewise during the months of Ashvayuji and Jyeshtha.[1] On the 4th day of the bright half of Magha the devotees have again been advised to worship Uma with great devotion and with a variety of ingredients and flowers. It is further mentioned that the devout women deserve to be honoured on this date The Purana further mentions that the faithful should celebrate the fourth day of the bright half of all the months of the year with full devotion but the one under discussion needs strict observance attention, especially by women. On the Magha Poornamashi the devotees have been directed to perform the Shraaddha of their manes while giving sesame and enough of food with other offerings to crows.[2] Bathing with fresh water and other activities are considered imperative, in case the concluding day of the dark half of the month of Pausha is conjunct with the Shravana constellation.[1]

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[1] *.Maghe masi site pakshe chaturthi ya bhaved dvija I*
Umasampujinam karyam tasyam saubhagyameepsunaa II
Poojyascha subhagastatra yoshitastu pativritaah II
Yasaam jeevanti naathaashcha swasriprabhritayashcha I
Sarvaashchaturtheeh shraddhaavanshchaturthee tritayam dhruvam I
Kaaryet naro Barhaman naaree kuryath visheshatah II
Nilamata Pu.,vv. 511, 513(b),514(a) 515.

[2] *Purnamasyam to Maghasya Shraaddham kritwa tilair narah I*
Kakanam Bhojanam Dadyat prabhutam bali samyetam II
Saiva chet Shraavanopetaa bhavita dwadashi dwija I
Saupavaaso Harim Devam tasyam sampoojiyeth budhah II Ibid. vv., 516,525.

A perusal of the celebrations of all these occasions as contained in the *Nilamata Purana* appear of a very simple nature laying more stress on bathing with fresh water, keeping vigil at nights, cleaning, fasting, and making offerings of some very common and ordinary items of daily use, like leaves, flowers, sesame, milk, purified butter, food, pulses, etc. This clearly indicates the initial origin of the rites during our ancient past when so called niceties of the present day were un-known to the people of Kashmir. With the passage of time all these Vrittas and Utsavas have undergone a great change with certain additions and alterations with the result that some of these have altogether been given up while some new practices, as we observe them now-a-days, have been added to the list. Though the basic principles of observance in our present day Vrittas and Utsavas have remained unchanged yet some other customs like giving away presents to the needy, have undergone a great change during the later Pauranic period when the valley came into more close contact with other regions of the sub-continent.

The performance of the following Vrittas and Utsavas as we observe them to day during the month of Magha, invite a special reference:-

1. Sa'hiban Hunz Sattam: -The birthday of Mata Rupa Bhawani also called Ropa Ded and Alkheshwari, the eighteenth century saint poetess of Kashmir who is revered as the incarnation of Mata Sharika, is celebrated on the seventh day of the dark half of Magha.
2. Shiva Chaturdashi – A Vrita that is observed continuously on the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth day of the dark half of Magha when, according to the *Shiva Purana* and *Shiva Parinaya*, Himalaya and his spouse Menaka decided

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[1] *Shravanena yuta saiva, yadi panchadashee bhavet I*
Tasyam snaanaadikam sarvam cha akshiyam parikeertitam II
Nilamata Pu., v., 510

to give their daughter Parvati, in marriage, to Shiva and deputed Narada as a messenger to mediate so that the matrimonial matter reach to their desired end. Accordingly, the devotees of Shiva everywhere share the joy expressed by gods in Heaven with the generous act of Shiva consenting to marry Parvati after her long penance. It appears that the name Tri Ratri of the *Nilamata* is called so probably, because of the fact that the Vritta extends over a period of three days that has undergone a change in its name to Shiva Chaturdashi. The change in the nomenclature and observance of the Vritta seems to have been a later development.

3. Gauri Tritiya, commonly called "Gora Tray", is celebrated on the third day of the bright half of Magha. Religious sanctity of the *Shiva Purana* is believed to be at the back of this festival. It is said that Narada was requested by Himvana (Himalaya) to proceed to Kailasha, the abode of Shiva, with the marriage document commonly called "Lagana Chandrika" Lagna Cheeri in Kashmiri language. Besides this the day has a four fold social importance. It is celebrated as the birthday of Sarasvati, the goddess of Learning. Kashmiri Hindus introduced their children to the first alphabet on this day in ancient Kashmir and the Kula Guru was considered as the first teacher of the child. An annual convocation was held at the sacred shrine of Sharada temple, a great seat of learning in Kashmir till recent past. On this day the previous batches of students were awarded the "Pragya", "Visharada" and "Shastri" degrees and testimonials and the function of Vidhyarambha or admission to the new classes started soon after the function.
4. Tiki' tso'ram: Tripura is considered to be an incarnation of goddess Kamakshi who is also one of the names given to goddess Durga/Parvati. It is believed that at the behest of Shiva Mother Goddess Parvati took the form of Tripura on the fourth day of the bright half of Magha, to annihilate the demon king Tripura. For this reason Shiva is also called Tripurari. Being a great event of victory and divinity, this

date is named as Tripura Chaturthi as is specified in the *Shiva Purana*. There is a sect among the Kashmiri Hindus called, "Tickoos," or "Tikus" who mostly, till recently, resided in Karafali Mohalla (close to Habba Kadal), known as Mohalla Tara Booni, in the down town Srinagar city. Besides considering their origin from the 'Tantric' sect of the Kashmiri Hindus, they consider Tripura as their clan deity, 'Ishta Devi'. Close to this Mohalla, there is a temple at the bank of the small rivulet called, 'Ka'ta ko'l'- a connecting canal between the Dal Lake and the river Vitasta, is named as Tara Booni Temple. It appears that it could have been the abode of Tripura in the ancient past and Booni, the auspicious tree that the ancient Hindus of the valley generally planted near their holy places (Asthapans}, existed there till recently. Booni is the original Kashmiri name for Chinar and the people of the valley use the word 'Booni' instead of 'Chinar' in their conversation even to day. 'Tara Booni' and 'Tripura Booni' besides being isotonic, appear identical words. Moreover being the Ishta Devi of the Tickoo clan, there is a legend regarding the shrine of the goddess in a private house owned by the Tickoos, of Karafali Mohalla. The legend is related to the appearance of the goddess in the house of Shri Prithvi Nath Tickoo who previously resided at Karafali Mohalla and who presently lives at Jammu as a result of the exodus of Hindus from the valley. He relates that some two centuries earlier, i.e., in the first decade of the nineteenth century approximately, one of his ancestors namely, Probhu Tickoo, who was a devotee of Tripura had a dream constantly for a few nights, advising him repeatedly that the deity desired to make Her abode in his house. But Mr. Tickoo insisted on a proof of the same which the deity agreed to give him in the near future. On one particular night he dreamed that the goddess asked him to visit Alikadal, Srinagar, in a Shikara with an empty container with its lid open. He was also directed to cover it with the lid, without looking into it, on crossing a particular point while sailing in the boat. The goddess also impressed upon Her devotee that a small water-spring (Nag) in the courtyard of his house would come into existence on his return which he should cover immediately with planks. The devotee acted according to the directions of the goddess and on the next day early in the morning he went to the fixed spot in a Shikara from his residence to Alikadal. He was astonished to see a small spring (Pokhar) in his courtyard on his return in the afternoon. Thus he got constructed a sanctum Sanctorum for the goddess in one of the rooms of his house and got the spring (Pokhar), covered with wooden planks. He made a temple type roofing over the Pokhar as a mark of respect to the deity. It is since then that the progeny of Probhu Tickoo celebrate the Jayanti of the goddess 'Tripureshori', an incarnation of Parvati every year on the said day. A big Havan is also performed and both vegetarian and non vegetarian food, especially 'Ta'ha'r', Kheer, small pancakes made from rice floor and cooked innards of a goat/sheep are offered to the deity and the festival is locally named as 'Tiki' tso'ram. The offerings of meat to the goddess denote its adherence to Tantrick rituals that are prevalent in the valley since long.[1]

5. Basant Panchami – the birthday of Mother Earth, according to the astrologers, is celebrated on the fifth day of the bright half of Magha. The *Nilamata Purana* confirms that the menstruation period of the earth ends on this very date and it is especially observed by the women folk only by taking a holy bath on this day. [2] Also the winter rains in the valley start from the second fortnight of Magha, which is considered as a good omen for the new year's farming/horticulture and all Chilas (Kalan, Kho'ra'd and Bachha), i.e., three month's cold spell of winter in Kashmir starts receding from this date.

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[1] The information has been collected by the author from Sh. Pradip Koul, (Khodabali), son-in-law of Shri Prithvi Nath Tickoo .

[2] *Tasyam eva panchamyam Kashmiraa tu rajuswalaa I*
Yasmaad bhawati kartavya tasyah poojaa tato dvija II
Nilamata Pu., v., 549.

6. Bhishama Ashtami – The death anniversary of Bhisham Pitamah, the aged warrior of the great epic Mahabharata who sided with the Kauravas during the war, is celebrated on the eighth day of the bright half of Magha. Lord Krishna is said to have directed all his devotees to offer him water on his death anniversary every year on this day for he remained a bachelor all his life for the cause of his king and the state. While offering water we name the great warier as the most beloved of Shankara and the son of the god who was a descendent from the Vayag Gotra [1]
7. Bhimasena Ekadashi is commonly called "Bumasin Kah," or Jaya Kah. (Jaya is one of the names given to goddess Durga.) It is celebrated on the eleventh day of the bright half of Magha. From this date the atmospheric temperature begins to rise and farming/gardening starts in the valley. Children are amused to hear the mythical story about Bhimsena, the second among the five sons of Pandava, who being voracious eater, set fire to the grass growing in the marshy land to confuse his mother about the day break so that he could break his three- day fast imposed on him by his mother (on the eve of Shiva Chaturdashi Vritta) for being a glutton.
8. Yakshini Chaturthi.; Yakshini is literarily considered to be the wife of Yaksha or Kubera, the guardian of the wealth of gods. The *Nilamata Purana* has named it as 'Yakshini Chaturthiyah' and has advised the worship of Uma, the spouse of Shiva on this day. The difference in the nomenclature of the Vritta and the change in its observance appear due to the influence of the later Puranas.
9. Magha/ Kava Punnim, is celebrated on the full moon night of the month of Magha. It appears that the festival has some bearing with Kak Bhusundi of the Ramayana as it is dedicated to the crow. The *Nilamata Purana* recommends in verse number 516 to perform a Shraaddha of the manes with sesame on this date and also states that cooked food

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[1] *Vayaga pada gotraaye Shankara pravaraa ya cha* I
Niputraayi Bhishmaaye idamastu tilodakam II
Karma Kandi No:2, by Keshav Bhat, 1933, p. 302

along with sufficient offerings be offered to the crows during the day. But now-a-days no Shraaddha of the manes is held on this date, though children get delighted to offer cooked food and vegetables to the crows on the house tops/ roofs and in open gardens on a platter woven from the local paddy grass, known as Ka'va' Po'tul.

11.**Shiva Caturdashi** -

(Shiva Meets Shakti)

Kashmiri Pandits follow a number of Vrittas (fasting) and Utsavas (celebrations and feastings) and yet it becomes often difficult to differentiate one from the other. To elucidate, we observe the days of Shiva Chaturdashi from the 12th day of the dark half of the month of Magha to Amavasya and Shiva Ratri for the same period falling on the dark fortnight of the month of Phalguna. We celebrate the former one as a Vritta while the latter one is celebrated as a festival and yet both involve worship of to Lord Shiva and Shakti, so one can not differentiate between the two unless studied more minutely. Again, Kashmiri Pandits worship Shiva and Vishnu besides Brahma and other gods and goddesses and deities and their Ganas with total adoration, devotion and intensity so much so that it is difficult to assess our liking and special veneration for any particular one, god or goddess. Not only is the process and manner of worship of all of these gods and goddesses almost similar in nature but also the observance of festivals is almost identical and appear almost a repetition. This bent up of mind has been the pride of Kashmiri Pandits from ancient times and we see the narrations advocating this kind of co-existence even in the *Nilamata*. While accepting the birth of Ram as an incarnation of Vishnu, [1] the *Purana* describes that Lord of the worlds; Vishnu would be born and named as Buddha in the twenty eighth Kali era. [2] It is further stated in the *Nilamata* that Buddha would be bathed and worshipped as per the Shakhta traditions [3]. The *Nilamata Purana* has also advocated the worship-modes of the aboriginal cults of the valley connected with the Nagas and the Pishachas and has stressed the adoption of their rituals.[1] Even our folklore advocates the same agreement and harmony on such occasions as we can see from the perusal of the following lines:

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[1] *Chaturvimshati sankhyayam tretaayam Raghunandadanah I*
Harrirmanushyo bhavitaa Raamno Dasharathanandanah II
Nilamata Pu., v. 518.

[2]. *Vishnu devo Jagannaatho Brahman praphte Kalau yuge I*
Ashtavimshattame bhaavee Buddhau naama Jagadguru II
Ibid., v., 709.

[3] *Buddaarchaa snaapanam kaaryam Shaakyokhtair vachnaistathaa* I
Ibid , v., 712 (a).

Maagha maasas yus shraan sandhya kari,
Luka hanz nye'ndhya kyah kari tas, I
Taav taav wothi tas ta kaav be'he's kana' dari,
Suy so'ri ga'ri ga'ri Hari Naaraan . II

One who bathes and performs smoothly his morning rituals in the month of Magha,
How can the backbiting by others affect him?
All shall know him like the morn crow on the edge of a housetop.
He shall always remember 'Hari (Shiva) and Narayana (Lord Vishnu).

The *Brihad Stotra Ratnakar*, is one of the oldest treatises containing among other things, mention of a number of rituals that we have been performing as a part of our "Deva Kriya" – the rituals connected with our gods and goddesses, since ancient times and a chapter of the said treatise is on the "*Krishna Shiva Chaturdashi Vritodhyapanam*", depicting the Vrittas and feastings to be held on the eve of Shiva Chaturdashi. While discussing different steps of worship, it clearly emphasizes that while worshipping Shiva, on each dark fourteenth day of every month of the year, the devotees should worship Parvati in the following forms on each such occasions:

1. As Uma in the month of Phalguna,
2. As Kantyayani in the month of Chaitra,
3. As Gauri in the month of Vaishakha,
4. As Kali in the month of Jyeshtha,
5. As Haimvatya in the month of Ashada,
6. As Ishwari in the month of Shravana,
7. As Shivani in the month of Bhadrapada,
8. As Bhawani in the month of Ashvayuji,

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[1] *Chaturthe ahni kartavyam Pishaachaanaam cha pujanam* I
Panchame ahni kartavyam sthaana Naagasya pujanam II
Nilamata Pu., v., 883.

9. As Rudhrani in the month of Kartika,
10. As *Sharvanya* in the month of Margashirsha,
11. As *Sarvamangala* in the month of Pausha, and
12. As *Parvati* in the month of Magha.[1]

There is a couplet in the *Brihad Stotra Ratnakr* that clearly directs venerating Shiva and Parvati on this particular day. The couplet reads, "I have worshipped you, Shiva and also Parvati with devotion and love on the fourteenth day of the dark half of Magha. May your favour be on me O! My Lord Shankara [2].

The *Nilamata Purana* clearly lays emphasis on the celebration of the Shiva Chaturdashi but the involvement of the gods for veneration and worship, etc., is quite different from the version that Kashmiri Pandits adopt at present. The relevant portions of the verses of the *Nilamata Purana* clearly mentions that "On the arrival of the fourteenth day of that dark fortnight, O best among the Brahmins, Shankara should be worshipped and a major festival be held at night." [3] It further clarifies that the virtuous and the most powerful Nikumbha and his followers should also be worshipped along with Shankara on that very fourteenth day. It is stressed in the *Purana* that the devotees should observe vigil during the night and worship Shambhu, the god of the gods with great devotion. It also tells about the worship of Nikumbha, the Pishacha Lord who is to be offered well-cooked oblations along with other Pishachas. The *Purana,* in the most clear words, discusses the kind of food, its various varieties (vegetarian and non vegetarian, etc.,) and the places where these offerings are to be placed for the *Pishachas.* Finally, it is stressed that on the approach of the fifteenth day of the Samvatsara and after completing all these rituals contained in the proceeding couplets, one should perform Shraaddha of one's manes with utmost faith and devotion and offer food to the dogs according to one's own choice. [1]

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[1] *Brihad Totra Ratnaakara*, Ed. By Jyotirvid Pt. Keshav Bhat year 1940, p., 65-66.

[2] *Maaghe Krishna Chaturdashyam Paarvatya Sahitah Shivah I*
Bhaktya sampoojitah so adhya priyataam mama Shankarah II
Ibid.,P. 66

[3] *Tatah chaturdasheem praapya taameva dvijpungva I*
Sampoojya Shankaram kaaryam raatrau tu mahat utsavam II
Nilamata Pu., v., 574.

It appears that the change in the mode of venerating the deities and gods as we see it in the present form, has taken its shape and form during the renaissance period of the Kashmir Shaiva philosophy in the eighth century and onwards. But one thing is worth consideration that the dates and the days of veneration have remained the same while the formalities held of these Vrittas have undergone a change. It is pertinent to point out that the first reference to various incarnations of gods is found in the *Shatapatha Brahman*a wherein the first three incarnations of Matsya, Kurma, and Varaha are associated with Prajapati and the last one, "Vamana" is linked with Vishnu. But in the Mahabharata, all the incarnations have been associated with Vishnu.[2] Our later *Puranas* have further enriched this concept on the new lines and have added various interesting mythological stories regarding such incarnations. Completely new forms of thought and modes of veneration, thus developed, have now been admitted in various cults over the years, the same theory seems to have worked here also in the observance of our Shiva Chaturdashi.

It is believed that the first meeting between Shiva and Parvati took place on the thirteenth day of the dark half of the month of Magha in her second birth in the house of Himalaya Raja after she had immolated herself in the Yajnya of Dhaksha Prajapati in her first birth. According to the legend contained in the Shiva Purana, the Danavas had a sway over the whole of the Swarga Loka endangering the seat of Indra. The demon king could be subdued only by Shiva's progeny. But annoyed Shiva had gone into deep Samadhi (penance) after the self immolation by Parvati at the Yajynya of her father, Daksha Prajapati. It was due to the intervention of gods that Parvati was reborn as Uma in the house of Himalaya and with her deep penance she succeeded in waking up Shiva from his deep Samadhi. The joint efforts of Kamadeva, Narada, all gods and other Shiva Ghanas bore fruit when Shiva agreed to marry Parvati and, as is contained in the *Shiva Purana,*` the agreement was reached during the concluding days of the dark fortnight of the month of Magha. Narada was deputed by Himalaya to proceed to Kailasha to place the collective request of gods before Shiva for His consent. Hence, to celebrate this Heavenly decision, the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth day of the dark fortnight of the month of Magha, are celebrated as Shiva Chaturdashi in the whole valley as is done in other parts of the sub-continent. These three days are observed as the days of complete penance and are spent in the worship of Lord Shiva. The three days of the fortnight, are also celebrated as 'Da'ham', - (the twelfth day of the fortnight), a day of a single cereal meal, 'Kah'(the thirteenth) - a day of no cereal meal and 'Bah' (the fourteenth) - again a day of a single cereal meal. The scriptures contain that by observing a fast on all the three days, as described above, the sins of a devotee are washed away provided he refrains from all sinful acts in future. House cleaning, fasting and giving alms to the needy and the deserving are the main activities on all the three days. The *Krishna Shiva Chaturdashi Vritodhyapanam,* which is held on the thirteenth day of the dark fortnight of Pausha, is a day of complete fast, and is named as 'Shiva Chaturdashi' festival, that concludes with the words, "Shiva is worth adoration, Shiva is worth remembering. It is known to all that Shiva is adored because there is nothing beyond Shiva that can lead us to the desired goal. It is Shiva who controls the consciousness of all the living things in this world. Shiva! Let my thoughts be for the welfare of all. O! Shiva! Save me while I repeatedly recite the name of Shiva and only Shiva."[1]

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[1] *Tasyam Vipra chaturdashyam Nikumbah Shankaram tadaa I*
Sampoojayti Dharmaatmaa saanuyatro mahaabhalah II
Tasyam tadaa prakartavyam nishi nityam prajaagaram I
Poojaa cha Deva Devasya Shambu kaarya prayatnatah II
Poojneeyo Nikumbastu Pishaachaadhipatirbalee I
Pishaachaanaam cha daatavya balayashcha susanskritah II
Tatah panchadasheem praapya cha antyam Samvatsarasya tu I
Shraadham kritvaa pradaatavyam shunaam annam yathechhakam II
Nilamaata Pu., vv. 575 -77, 582

[2] *Mahabharata, Narayaneeya Parva* , XII- 310;37; 399,77-90; and 104.

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[1] *Vandhyah Shivah smri Shivam viditam Shivena,*
Vande, Shivaayi na Shivaat paramasti kinchit I
Vishvam Shivasya vashagam mama dheeh Shiveastu,
Traayasva maam Shiva Shiveti japantu vaachah II
Brihad Stotra Ratnakar, Etd.,by Keshava Bhatt 1940, p., 67

12. The"Shiva Chamar"

By Acharya Abhinava Gupta

Note: It is a humble attempt to translate into English the devotional song attributed to the worship of Lord Shiva, commonly known as Shiva *Aarthi*/Chamara "*Atibheeshana* " on the request of some of the devotees of *Shiva.*

Oh! The most terrible and harsh-speaking are the two of agents of Death
Who continuously strike, harass and remind me of their presence,
While in distress I remember You and *Uma* together
O! Lord Shiva! My Master, let all my misfortunes be foiled
The most inaccessible with agile senses is the horde of my enemies (*Indriyas*) within me,
And they continuously bite me as hard, strike me as the thunderbolt,
That I prattle with wicked thoughts and disapproving movements
O! Crescent Holder, Shiva I wish a small corner in the heart of my Lord
O! Shiva!, My Master, let all my misfortunes be foiled
My Saviour from re-births, You are adored even by gods
O! Lord you are the killer of the *Dhanuja,* (Cupid) and saviour of Rati,
The Lover of *Girija, Parameshvara,* bestow me with the boon of Eternal calm posture, justice and eliminate all my sins,
O! Shiva! My Master, let all my misfortunes be foiled,
O! Lord of *Indra,* founder of *Krita Yuga,* fore-runner of the Four Ashrams,
The killer of Kali, saviour from all odds, make our enemies frail,
The upholder of all the *Varnas* and their families,
All they feel a trembling sensation like infants before thee,
O! Shiva, My Master, let all my misfortunes be foiled,

O! Self Created, the whole of my body is restless for the betterment of others
O! Lord, our hearts feel ailing within, fill your progeny with solace,
Like a disciple at your sweet feet, bestow on me your affection,
For my earnest desire is to keep you always in my heart.
O! Lord Shiva! My Master, let all my misfortunes be foiled.

13. *SOMAWATI AMAVASYA*
SUMRI MAVAS

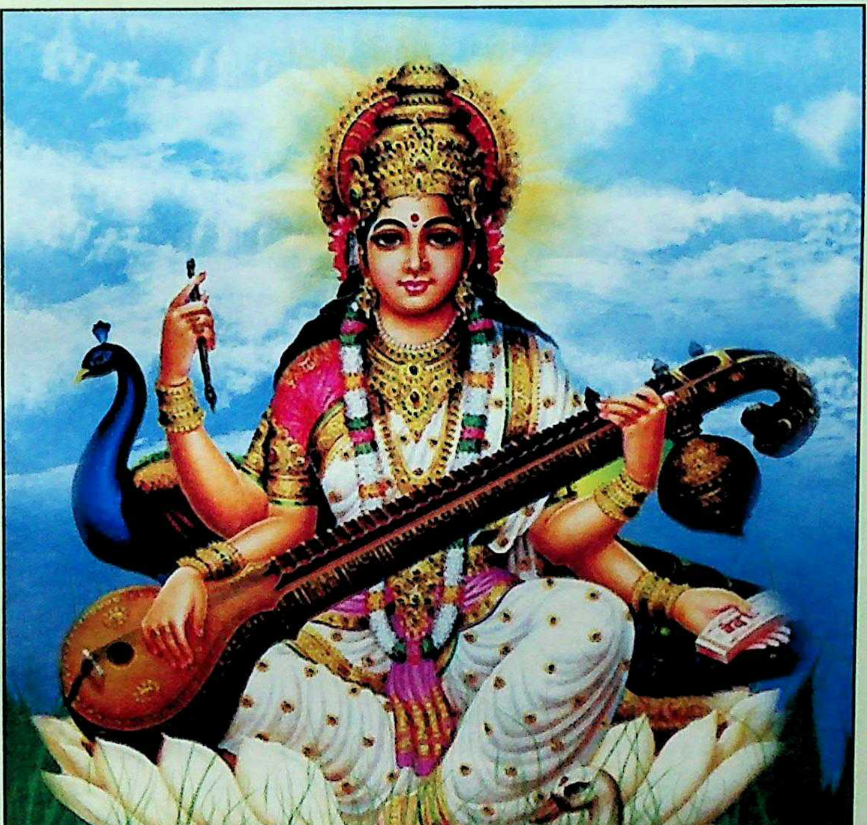
'Soma' is a Sanskrit word and has very profusely been used with a number of shades of meanings in our *Vedas,* and *Puranas*. Repeated usage of the word in our holy scriptures itself clearly indicates its importance which it had in our ancient literature. The lexical meaning of the word 'Soma' is the moon and it is also the name of the 1st day of our week, called, 'Somvar' – the day of the moon, a derivation from 'Soma'. Later it got the name as Tsandervar – the day attributed to Chandra, the moon. Besides this, the word has been used in our ancient literature in different meanings that denote:

1. 'Kubera', the guardian of the treasures of gods;
2. 'Yama', the lord of death;
3. 'Vayu' or 'Varuna', the lord of air;
4. An ambrosia type of a song that is free from the burden of any rhyme and rhythm, known as 'Soma Pada' ;
5. Often used as a synonym for nectar, water; a ray of moon, heaven, and the sky for a special kind of sacrifice known as 'Soma Yajnya' that was performed after taking an intoxicating juice extracted from the moon plant, also known as 'Soma Rasa',
7. A penance performed on Monday for the removal of the bad effect of 'Soma' or; Chandra' (Astrologically) known as, 'Soma Yajnya ;
8. A special clan of Rajputs , known as 'Soma / Chandra Vamshi'; and
9. The fifteenth day of the dark half of a lunar month falling on a Monday, known as 'Soma' or Somawati/Sumri Amavasya.

'Soma Amavaya', is also called 'Sumri Mavas'. in Kashmiri and we also name it as 'Soma Amavas/Amavasya'. Amavas/Amavasya or simply Mavas' is a Sanskrit word, meaning the meeting place/point or conjunction of the sun and the moon. It is a lunar conjunction that takes place on the last day of the dark fortnight of every month falling on a Monday The ancient Indian astrologers are of the opinion that the planet, 'Mercury,' has come into existence on this very particular horal moment and they use 'Soma' as an epithet of Mercury.

There is a mythological story relating to a Rishi in the Pauranic Age (Dvapara Yuga) who lived a long life waiting for the most auspicious horal moment of 'Soma Amavasya' so that he could perform his cherished 'Soma Yajnya' on that particular horal moment for the welfare of his own self and for the prosperity of the whole world in general. But no such horal moment took place during his life time. Disgusted, the Reshi, foreseeing that the date of his demise was coming very close and that his long felt desire remained unfulfilled, he cursed the 'Soma Amavasya' saying, "Disappointed as I am due to the non-occurrence of the auspicious horal moment of the 'Soma Amavasya' throughout my long life, I curse thee to occur repeatedly during the 'Kali Yuga/ era', when there will be no one to observe the penance that I had decided to undertake during all my life."

This narration further emphasizes the importance and occurrence of such a horal moment during the present era that we call 'Kali Yuga'. No doubt the practice of special penance or any of the sacrificial offerings are very rarely followed at present but the devotees still find time to have a holy bath at some specific rivers or ponds mentioned in our scriptures especially on such horal occasions. It is because of this very fact that a large number of devotees visit Haridwar, Prayaga and Pushkar Tirthas on such horal moments for the good of their own self and for the welfare of the society as a whole. In Kashmir a big congregation is held at Somayar Temple Ghat on the banks of Vitasta at Habakadal, Srinagar on this occasion and the devotees from various parts of the valley come to this place for a holy dip in the river. The nomenclature of the said temple denotes that it is associated with 'Soma'. On the exodus from the valley, the Kashmiri Hindus take a holy dip at a number of places like the Ranvir Canal, River Tawi or in the Chinab at Akhnoor. Most of the devotees make a quick dash to Haridwar, Pushkar and Kurukshetra or other places of religious sanctity on all such occasions.



Sarasvati Poojana On Gauri Tritiya

14. Gauri/ (Guru)Tritiya

The Day Consecrated to Goddess Sarasvati

Besides naming the valley as 'Kashmir,' our ancient books on our history, culture and religion etc., have named it as Kashmira, Sati Desha, Sharada Desha, Sharada Mandala, Sharada Peetha or even just Sharadi. A recognition of such a high order to this small piece of land in the whole subcontinent, including Central Asia and beyond, could not have been possible unless the teachers, philosophers and thinkers at the top of the highest seats of learning in the valley, had not attained their due fame and recognition through the length and breadth of the sub-continent. Kalhana, while giving an account of Lalitaditya's reign (c. A.D. 724/25-61) mentions that the followers of a Gauda king of Bengal had come to Kashmir under a pretence to visit the shrine of Sharada, but in reality they intended to avenge the murder of their king at the hands of Lalitaditya.[1] In the early eleventh century, a Middle East traveler to India, Alberuni, has also made a mention of this fact in his travelogue. Hemachandra, the Jain scholar (A.D. 1088-1172), requisitioned the manuscripts of the eight earlier Sanskrit grammars written on birch bark from the library of Sharada Peetha when he was commissioned at the court of Jayasinha of Gujarat (A.D.1028-55) to compose a new Sanskrit grammar.[2] According to Hindu mythology, Sarasvati is the goddess of wisdom and knowledge and yet we are seldom able to differentiate between a number of our gods and goddesses in what powers they possess. Even the great Rishis who have compiled our Puranas have often made us to believe that the difference in the name is of secondary importance. To quote the *Nilamata Purana*, on the one hand it directs the learned gentry to worship their books in the temple of goddess Durga,

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[1] *Rajatarangini*, Translated by M.A. Stein, Reprint, 1979, Vol., I., v. 325.

[2] Ibid., Vol., II p., 286.

(verse No: 819) knowing that the goddess of learning is Sarasvati. It clearly indicates that books should be worshipped in the temple of goddess Durga and it further says that the sons of craftsmen should get their tools worshipped by the people who are great artisans.[1]

Pursuit of learning has been the main life activity of Kashmiri Pandits from ancient times. Poet Damodhar Gupta, the author of the book *Kuttanimatam* and the Prime Minister of Jayapida, (779 - 813 A.D.) the famous king of Kashmir, states that those who do not learn about the dress, manners and speech of other lands, or do not respect their teachers, are just like bulls without horns. [2] This clearly indicates that the people of the valley would go to any extent in pursuit of knowledge.

At the outset of the *Rajatarangini*, Book I. Kalhana states that Kashmir, the abode of Shiva, is the home of goddess Sarasvati. Commenting on Kashmirian society, Dr. Krishna Mohan is of the opinion that, " The *Rajatarangini* and other Kashmirian sources give ample evidence of the scholarly education not only of the Brahmins who attained high proficiency in all the branches of literature, but also of men of other castes [3]...." The age of sending the small children to Gurukulas, which at that time served as the most venerated seats of learning for the children of the society, was definitely very early and it was connected with the Yajnyopavita ceremony of the child before any future education was given to a pupil, though the selection for higher education was very tough.[4] This fact has been admitted by a number of later Kashmirian historians, Alberuni (1030 A.D.), the famous Arabian traveler, states in this connection in his travelogue that "The initial training in learning the letters was given to the children at the age of five. A Hindu boy was placed under the charge of a Guru, a spiritual preceptor, who looked after him until he reached the next stage of life." i.e. after completing the basic schooling or higher education, as the case might be. The next stage for a young man was the Grahastha Aashrama.[1] Bilahana, a great Sanskrit scholar of Kashmir, (1028–1063 A.D) confirms the literary efficiency of the women of Kashmir who could fluently express themselves in even Sanskrit and Prakrita languages [2] King Jayapida of the Karkuta dynasty (751-82 AD.) is reported to have invited from outside the state, a number of scholars, poets, expositors and thinkers and settled them in his domain suitably with great honour. He got restored the *Mahabhashya* of Patanjali that had previously been missinterrupted. The search of the king for scholars was so earnest that it created a dearth of scholars for the kings of many states of the sub-continent [3] Jonraja lauds the action of king Zain-ul-Abidine (1420 -70 A.D.) in having invited and honoured the learned men during his reign. In his words, "The wise king, the preceptor of the wise and the learned, re-established the flow of knowledge and education in his kingdom and he held it with both his hands as if making evident the rivulets that had disappeared due to the cracks that had emerged on the surface of the earth due to the ignorance that had swept the whole valley [4]. Such was the urge of the Kashmiris for learning and acquiring knowledge in the past.

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[1] *Durgaa grihe pustakaanaam poojaa kqarya tathaa dvija I*
Swataanaam shilpi bhaandaanaam kaarya shilpijanyena cha II
Nilamaata Pu., v., 819.

[2] *Deshaantareshu veshas vabhaavabhanitaani ye na budhayante I*
Samupaasate na cha guroon vishaanvikalaasta ukshaanah II
Kuttanimatam, v., 211

[3] Dr. Krishna Mohan *Early Medieval History of Kashmir year, 1981, p 240*

[4] *Kashmir Hindu Sanskars*" (*Rituals. Rites and Customs*), by S.N. Pandit, pp. 67 – 79.

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[1] "*Albiruni's India*" Vol. II p., 188.

[2] *Yatra streenaamaapi limaparam janmabhashaavadeva   I*
Pratyavaasam vilasata vachah Sanskritam Prakritam cha   II
Bilhana, *Vikramankadeva Charitam*, XVIII., 6.

[3] *Deshaantaraat aagamya vbhaachakshaanaan kashamaapati   I*
Praavartayat vichichhannam Mahabhashyam svamandale   II
Samgriheet tathaa raajaa so anvishya nikhilaan budhaan   I
Vidvad durbiksham abavad yatha anya nripa mandale   II
Kalhana, *Rajatarangini, Book IV*., v., *488,493*.

[4] *Randhrair adhogatim praphtaa kulyevod dhritya bhu bhujaa   I*
Vidhya pravaahitaa tena guninaa gunaraaginaa   II
Rajatarangini by Jonraja, v., 772.

Sharada is the most venerated tirtha of the valley of Kashmir situated at its Northernmost corner and at the confluence of the Kishan Ganga, also known as Neela (Krishna) Ganga in our *Puranas* and chronicles, and Madhumati streams, near the village of Sharadi (now in P.O.K.). It was also considered one of the reputed seat of learning that had attracted the great Rishi Shandalya to the beautiful land of Kashmir as described in the *Sharada Mahatmya* [1]. In fact the earliest reference to goddess Sarasvati is contained in the *Rajatarangini* of Kalhana while discussing the importance of the 'Papasudana Tirtha'- the tirtha where all sins get washed away. [2] The *Nilamata* has once named Parvati as Gauri in verse 1053 among a number of goddesses in verses (1051-53.) But immediately in the next verse (1054) it names and adores Her sitting in the lap of Hara near Chakraswami at whose sight all the sins get vanquished and one is honoured in the world of Rudra. In fact, the *Nilamata* has clubbed together the description of a number of Tirthas with special reference to the Kalodaka Thirtha, known as Hara Mukuta Ganga to the Kashmiri Pandits. It is situated to the east of the Haramukata Mountain, the description of which is contained at a number of places in the *Purana*. [3] The first reference regarding the Sharada Tirtha, situated at the confluence of the Madhumati and the Kishan Ganga rivers, is contained in Kalhana's *Rajatarangini.* [4] The account of this tirtha is also contained in the *Sharada Mahatmya* that appears to have been written at a later date. The *Mahatmya* consecrates the tirtha to goddess Durga at its present location and its establishment to Rishi Shandalya. The *Nilamata,* besides advising vegetarian offerings to the goddess Sharada, the *Sharada Mahatmya* advocates presentation of non-vegetarian offerings as well [5] .

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[1] *Bhagvan ya Mahaadevi Shaaradaakhya Sarasvatee* I
Kashmirasyam svatapsaa Shandalyena avataaritaa II
Shri Sharada Sahasra Namavali, by Swami Satchidanand Puri, 1994, p. 3.

[2] Kalhana, *Rajatarangini*, Book I, v., 32.

[3] Dr. Ved Kumari, *The Nilamata Pu.*, vv. 1088, 1143,1294, 1296.

[4] Kalahana, *Rajatarangini*, Book I , v., 37.

[5] *Hastyashvorathayanaishcha vaasubhishshayanaistathaa* I
Mahishair bahubhishshaakair bhakshya maamsaishcha paanakaih II
Sharada Mahatmya, (Stein, Cat.,No: 3886, folio, 5, v., 39).

This is a clear indication that till the composition of the *Nilamata Purana* the under currents of Pauranic interpretations of the later Brahmanical philosophy that appear to have influenced the Kashmirian society, seem not known to the composers of the *Nilamata.*

The first account of the Shiva Bhutesh/ Sharada temple and Vihara is found in the *Rajatarangini* when Ashoka the Great (273 – 232 B.C.), ruled over Kashmir. He is said to have visited the famous shrine of Sarasvati/Durga at Shiva Bhutesh to get the boon of a son who could save the beautiful land of Kashmir from foreign invaders [1]. The place has remained a seat of learning from the very ancient times in the valley of Kashmir up to the nineteenth century and we come to know of it from a perusal of a legend about the great Jain scholar Hemchandra who was asked by his master, King Jaya -Simha of Gujarat (1028 to 1055 A.D.), to up-date the grammar of Sanskrit language "*Siddhanta Kaumadi*". For this purpose he desired that the copies of the eight volumes of this grammar that already existed at the famous Sharada Vihara in the Sharada Desha, which at that time was one of most famous seats of learning, might be made available to him to take up the new assignment.[2] The presence of a temple and a Vihara is also reported by Jonraja in his *Rajatarangini* [3] Maharaja Gulab Singh (1792- 1856 A.D.), who was a great patron of knowledge and learning, is said to have donated a large Jagir to this shrine for the maintenance of the shrine and for the daily needs of the scholars and students who lived at the Vihara.

The word Medha is derived from the root word Medh, meaning a sacrifice or a sacrificial offering to a deity. In the religious scriptures of the Hindus, wearing of Yajnyopavita, is one of the prominent Sanskaras. It is also known as Medha besides, Upanayana, Mekhala, etc. The lexical meaning of

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[1] Kalhana, *Rajatarangini*, Book I, v., 107.

[2] Ibid., Pt., II, p. 286, xiv.

[3] Jonraja, *Rajatarangini*, Ed., by Raghunath Singh, year 1972, vv.,1060-72 (Bombay Ed.,) p. 460

Medha is also intellect, sense, prudence, understanding, wit, etc. Now that all these faculties expected from a young man, are definitely attained through education, a Hindu boy was imparted the first alphabet on the Jayanti day of the Sarasvati, the goddess of knowledge, who is also named on Gauri Tritiya. It is believed that all these qualities are attained by a boy after he is invested with the Sacred Thread. The function of investing children with the Sacred Thread was done at the famous Shrine of Sharada/ Sarasvati Vihara close to the present temple sight at the Sharada Peetha situated to the northernmost corner of the valley of Kashmir close to the present L.O.C. Here the scholars decided about the future educational programmes of the pupils assembled there for attainment of higher education. The first step towards this direction was imparting the Sacred Thread to the boys after introducing them to the basic or elementary alphabet. [1] Pupils, who were not found up to the mark, were returned to their parents after being invested with the Medha or Yajnyopavita whereas the sharp and intelligent boys were retained for higher learning. It is because of this very fact that that imparting the Yajnyopavita to a boy is considered as the rebirth of the child and he assumes the name of a "Dwij" at the moment he is imparted the Holy Thread.

The discussion for holding the Annual Convocation was held on Gauri Tritiya every year at the Sharada Peetha, while the Kula Guru introduced the child students to the first alphabet at his village level on this date. A big congregation was held at the shrine on the eighth day of the bright half of the month of Bhadra also known by the names of Sharada/ Ganga/ Radha, Ashtami in the whole of the sub-continent. During all this period the child was imparted introductory learning so that he could face interview for the attainment of higher education.

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[1] *Vigyanakaariunee venya varda Vardeshvoree I*
Vidhyavatee vaidhyamaataa vidhya haaravibhushanaa II
Panchaatmikaa panchavarnaa panchatigma subhedinee I
Mukhtidaa Munivaneeshee Shandlya vardaayinee II
Shri Sharada Sahasranama Totram, Ed. .by Swami Sachidananda Puri , year 1994 , p.24-25.

On the date of the Convocation that was attended by learned gentry of the valley, the admission of fresh batch of students to various branches of knowledge and learning was discussed. The impact of goddess Sarasvati / Sharada was so deep that the scholars had developed a special script that was a developed from of the Brahmi and Kharoshti scripts of the later date, for imparting education and learning and this script is to date known as Sharada script. It was initially taught to the students in such a way that it suited the phonetical order of the Kashmiri language as we presently teach elementary language primers to the small school going children. However, due to the combined apathy of the Government and the people, especially the Hindu population of the valley, a very small number of people from the Brahman class is now left who know this script and can still help in transcribing our Sharada treasure of books lying in various research libraries of the sub-continent and even abroad, into Devanagri. All our efforts to study the written material in Sharada concerning our old and immediate past, is becoming more uncertain with the passage of time as the number of this script knowing scholars is now dwindling due to the long passage of time and acute negligence.

The Sharada Tirtha appears to have lost its old grandeur and importance especially during the unfavourable medieval period of Kashmir history. We have a reference in the *Rajatarangini* vs., 2552, and 2706 confirming the siege of the fortress of Sharadi. Jonraja has given a vivid description of the pilgrimage of king Zain-ul-Abidin, to the shrine of Sharada and refusal of the goddess to accede to his request to reveal Her presence to the king and his wicked Malecha followers and attendants. It is said the king wanted to remove the idol of the deity from this place by force and install it suitably in the city. Jonraja reports that for this wicked action of the king the goddess Sharada cursed Her own image and broke it into pieces out of rage.[1] However, Abul Fazal,(16th century) one of the ministers at the court of Akbar the Great, has confirmed the existence of the Sharada temple that enjoyed considerable reputation throughout the valley of Kashmir at that time. He has given an account of the shrine that coincides with its present location

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[1] *Rajatarangini* by Jonraja, Bombay Edition, vvs., 1056-71

The other story connected with Gauri Tritiya is from the Shiva Purana. It is said that Dakhsha Prajapati, the father of Sati, (one of the names of Parvati before her birth at the house of Himalaya Rajya), was not willing to marry his daughter with Shiva. But he had to yield before the wishes of his daughter and she was married to Shiva against his wishes. Soon after the celebrations, Daksha left on an expedition to curb the 'Asuras. On his successful return, he performed a big Yajnya to which he invited all the gods and goddesses except Shiva. This action of her father was unbearable for Sati who went to her parental house against the wishes of her husband to assess the situation herself. Not bearing the insult done to her husband by her father, she jumped into the Holy Fire lit for the Ashva Medha Yajnya and immolated herself. On hearing the fate of Sati at her parental house, Shiva was furious and in his 'Tandava', deathly dance, He ordered 'Bhairavas', at His service, to punish the wicked Dakhsha and He himself went into a trance or "Samadhi". In the mean time Sati was reborn in the house of Himalaya as Parvati and she did a long penance so as to please Lord Shiva, who was much annoyed that Sati had not taken His advice seriously and had attended the Yajnya of Daksha against His wishes. It was with the efforts of gods and the long penance of Parvati that Shiva was pleased and He graced her with His presence on the thirteenth day of the dark half of the month of Magha, popularly known as Shiva Chaturdashi. Himalaya was very much pleased to accept Shiva as a match for his daughter. Narada, being the messenger between gods and other heavenly beings and bestowed with eternal immortality by gods, acted as a mediator between Shiva and Himalaya. Finally Himalaya deputed him to go to Kailasha, the abode of Shiva in the Himalayas, commonly called "Heemal Parbat" "Himalaya" or "Kailasha" in the popular legends of Kashmir, along with a 'Lagna Chandrika:'.("Lagna Cheeri" in Kashmiri). It is a written document of marriage proposal with a portrait of a god and a goddess in the centre in 'Jai Mala' posture and also containing details of the position of the stars at the auspicious moment, known as ’Mahurta’ of marriage. It also contains details regarding the names and the ‘Gotra:’ of the bride and the groom, the timings for holding various marriage rites and the number of guests etc, to accompany the marriage party.[1] All these details are said to have been discussed on the date of the Gauri Tritiya and the day for the marriage is fixed on the thirteenth day of the dark half of the month of Phalguna, popularly known as ‘Hayrath’.

It is felt that the Brahmanical sect has mixed this ceremony with the one contained in the *Shiva Purana* that involves the worship of.‘Sarasvati along with goddess ‘Shakti’ which is held on the occasion of Gauri Tritiya. The practice described in the *Shiva Purana* and *Shiva Parinya*, is held as a ritual and repeated on the ‘Gauri Tritiya’, commonly known as the ‘Guru-Gora/ Tray’. All the members of the family rise up early in the morning on the stipulated date and after cleaning the house and besmearing it with clay, the children wait eagerly for their Kula Guru to visit their house with a painting containing the images of various gods and goddesses with a couplet written in praise of goddess ‘Sarasvati’ at its center. Images of deities painted on it are generally those of ‘Sarasvati’, ‘Lakshmi’ and ‘Ganesha’ besides other pictures of leaves, flowers and images of different plants and animals. In the middle of the painting, a couplet in praise of goddess ‘Sarasvati’ is written lucidly that reads “The lotus eyed goddess Sarasvati, the bestower of great fortune in the form of learning and knowledge, the omnipresent, broad-eyed goddess of wisdom, may favour all of us with the glory of learning”[1].

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[1] This practice still continues among Kashmiri Pandits on the eve of their daughter’s marriage. A few days before the actual date of wedding, the Kula Guru (as Narada) of the bride’s side, visits the groom’s house along with the ‘Lagna Cheeri’.(For more details p,s. Kashmir Hindu Sanskars-(Rituals, Rites and Customs) by the author .pp., 199-201)

Besides, the word ‘Gora Tray’ contains one more literal meaning in our popular Kashmiri language. A picture, a portrait, printed cloth, an image or writing on paper or on the walls containing more bright/dark colours and written in an un-artistic way, is nick-named a ‘Gora Tray.’ A faulty white washing or besmearing profusely or applying different bright/Dark colours on the walls too is given the same name.

It may be recalled that Ranga Dvoy was celebrated on the second day of the bright half of the month of ‘Magha’, and in the past this day was devoted to the collection and preparation of different colours as the synthetic and ready-made colours were unknown to the world till recently. The colours for preparing images and portraits of the gods and goddesses, animals and plants, etc., were made locally by using flowers and leaves of different colours and shades in place of modern synthetic colours. All this devotion was meant for celebrating and making the portraits of Mother Goddess ‘Sarasvati’ and other deities for presentation to the devotees on the next day. Now due to the fact that the printed portraits of different gods and goddesses are available in the market at much cheaper rates and also that the ready-made colours are easily available in the market, the art of painting pictures by hand has come to an end including the labour that it involved in making such natural colours. The result is that the importance of making eco-friendly colours has come to an end so much so that only a faint memory of it is alive in the minds of a few people now. In this way the institution of Kashmir ritualistic paintings, drawings and colour portraits has come to an end.

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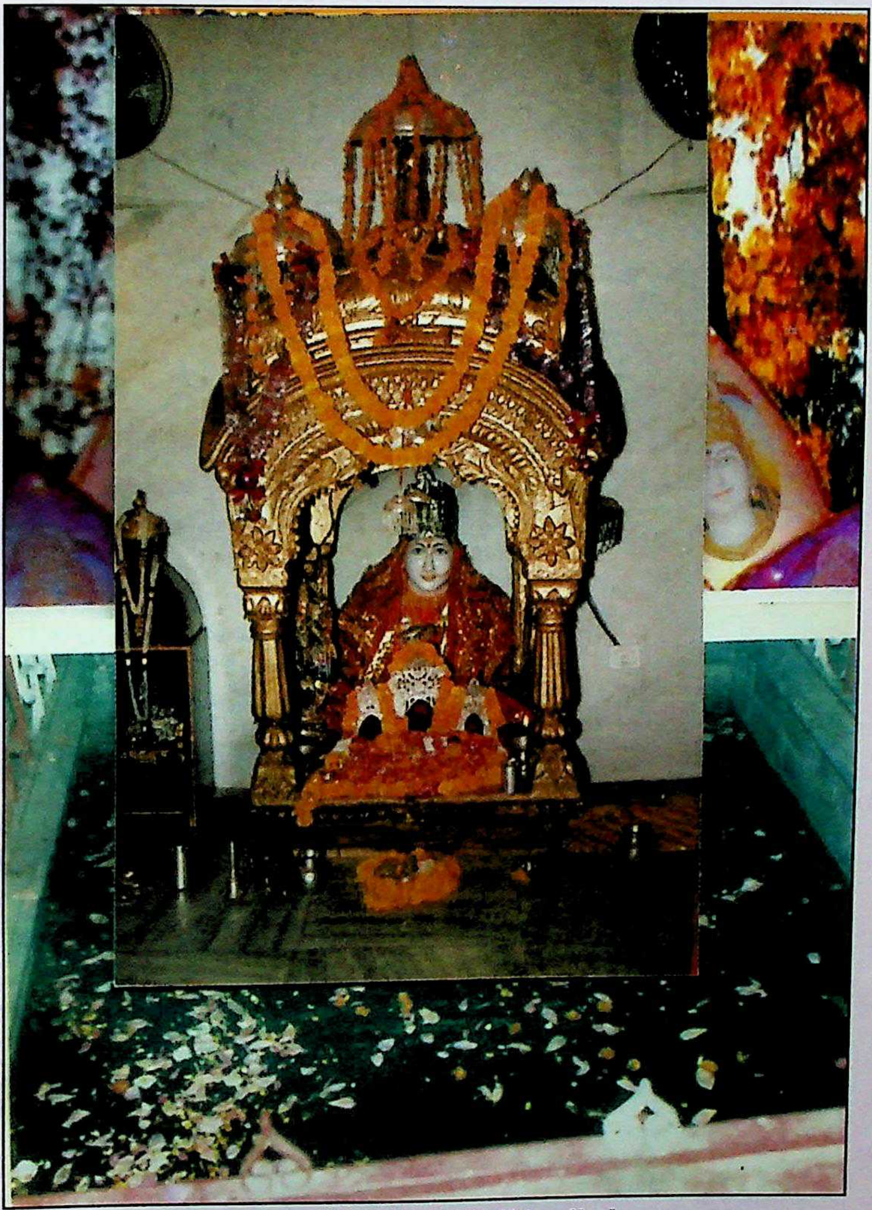
[1] The text of the verse is:
Sarasvati Mahaabhaage Vidhya Kamal lochane I
Vishva rope Vvishaalaakshi vidhyam dyehi Sarasvati II
Vijyeshwar Jantari, No·227 (2009-10), Ed. Dr Manmohan Jyotshi, p.14.
Or it simply contained the couplet:
“*Shaaradaa vardhaa Devi moksha dhaataa Sarasvati I*
Namas tasya namas tasya namas tasya namo namah II”



Rajnya Bhawani at Po'kharibala,
Hari Parbat, Srinagar, Kashmir

15. HORA ASHTAMI

Po'khribal, (Hari Parbat)

In fact the hillock known as Hari Parbat has remained a place of importance and veneration for the people of the valley of Kashmir since its emergence from the deep waters of the Satisara. The importance of the hillock was manifold when it was selected by Mother Goddess, Sharika as her personal abode. The ancient history of Kashmir in particular mentions that the construction and expansion of the Srinagar city has always remained confined around the premises of this hillock. Even Praversen II laid the city of his choice in the vicinity of this hillock so as to save his subjects from the perpetual devastation by floods that inundated every year large areas of agricultural land of the valley including the old city of Puranadhishthan, laid by his forefathers. The *Sharika Mahatmya* says that the Devi selected Her abode on the Hari Parbat hillock along with Her ninety million incarnations after annihilating the Rakshasas that included Madhu and Kaitabha, Mahishasura, Dhumraketu, Chanda and Munda and helped Lord Vishnu in annihilating the water born demon Jalodbhava. The *Durga Stotrawali* further praises her in the form of Mahishawari, the bestowal of safety to all of us, the goddess of all Siddhis and wealth to her devotees, the destroyer of the demons like Shumbha and Nishumbha; and includes a prayer that Her ninety million incarnations might save all of us .[1]

Shri Sharika Devi is also named as Ashta Dasha Bhuja – a deity having eighteen arms. In fact it symbolizes the Ultimate Power of the Devi, Para Shjakti that She possessed during Her nine main incarnations (Swaroopas) in the form of Durga, Sarasvati, Jwala, Sharada, Rajnya, Sharika, Lakshmi, Bhadrakali, Shiva, Tripura, and thus attained the name of Divine Mother or the Mother Goddess as detailed in the *Mahatmya* and a number of other religious scriptures. [1]

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[1] *Ya maaya Madhu Kaitabhapramathnee ya Maahishonmulinee,*
Ya Dhmure kshana Chanda Munda mathanee ya Rakhta Bhijaashanee I
Shaktih Shumbha Nishumbha Daitya dalanee ya Siddha Lakshmee Paraa,
Saa Devee nava koti murti sahitaa maam paatu Maaheshwaree II
Gnesh-Durga Strotravali, by Pt. Keshav Bhat, Bombay,1925 v.10, p.,64.

Now that the people of the valley have deeply been associated with the ancient Shaiva Darshana of Kashmir, the Mother worship or Shakti worship has played a great part in the Tantra rituals that have flourished in the Shaiva Darshana of Kashmir from time to time. The *Stvarajah* of Maha Rajnya, discussed in *Dasha Vidhya Rahasya* of the *Rudra Yamala Tantra,* is contained in the *Shri Maha Rajnya Stotra.* [2] The lexical meaning of the word, "Yamal" is a 'couple', or a 'brace'. The Shaiva philosophy of Kashmir has named the conjugation of Shiva and Shakti as "Yamal". The *Shaiva Dharshan Brihad Kosha* has defined "Yamal" as the union of Shiva and Shakti that transforms itself into the Para Shakti. [3] Acharya Abhinava Gupta has further elucidated it in his treatise, as "the main creator of the Ultimate Force (known as Para Shakti or Pratibhigya Darshan} which is an outcome of all the three forces known as, "Tri Shakti", three godly powers discussed in our scriptures. These are:

1. Ichha Shakti, (desire)
2. Jnyana Shakti (knowledge), and
3. Kriya Shakti, (performance). [4]

It has further been emphasized that the Tri-Shakti as discussed in various philosophies is something different from the one propounded in the Yamala Shastra.[1] It confirms in clear terms that all other Shastras consider this trinity of forces as separate identities, independent of one another, whereas the Yamala Shastra (Tantra) considers all the three forces as a single entity that gives rise to a fourth and final force known as Para Shakti.[2]

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[1] *Durgaam tvaam cha Sarasvateem Jwalaamukheem, Shaaradaam,*
Rajneem Shaarika yayutaa maghahareem twam Bhadrakaaleem Shivaam, I
Vaageesheem Tripuraam Bhajaami samayam Peetheshvareem Siddhidaam,
Gayatreem Kamlaasanasya vanitaam Shri Kubjikaam Kaalikaam II
Gnesh-Durga Strotravali, by Pt. Keshav Bhat, Bombay,1925, v.,80, P.70-71.

[2]. *Maha Rajnya, Jwala,Sharika, and Ganesha Sahasra Namawali* , Bombay Ed., year 1925, p.204

[3] "*Yamalam: Shiva-Shakti sanghataatmakam Paarmeshwaram svaroopam*" *Shaiva Dharshan Brihad Kosha*, Pt.II, Year 2005, p.559.

[4] *Eaka veero Yamalotha Trishaktish chaturaatrmakah* I
Ibid., P.,559.

This fact of expansion and development of Tri-Shakti further corroborates with the explanation given by Acharya

Abhinava Gupta in his " *Malini Vijaya Vartikam*." It is assessed that 'the three powers in their compounded and unified form play the main role in this philosophy but considering them as separate entities not interdependent so as to supplement the creation of the Super Power, differentiates it from the Yamala Shastra. The Super Power thus formed is, in fact, the essence that maintains the ultimate control of this extreme power. [3]

After killing the demons Chanda, Munda, Madhu, Kaitabha, Mahishasura and others in the past and after the annihilation of the water born demon Jalodbhava by Lord Vishnu, Mata Sharika also known as Durga, felt relieved. In order to look contently at the dry piece of the beautiful land that had emerged from the Sara, Sharika made a permanent abode for Herself on the western side of the hillock known as Chakreshvara or Sharika Peetha so that She could see the whole valley of Kashmir from the heights of the Hari Parbat also known as Pradyuman Peetha. Resting Her head at the place which later took the name of Chakreshvara, she extended her legs towards the North-West corner to the end of the hillock where Shri took the serene form of Rajnya, close to the spring known as Po'khribala.

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[1] Atra Shakti triyam mukhyam sampoornasithiti kalpate I
Shaiva Dharshan Brihad Kosha, Pt.II, Year 2005, P.,559

[2] *Yamala Shaastram: - Yasmin Shaastre Shakti Triyasya parasparam sugunapradhaana bhavena stithih, Nah punastrikashastravat shakti trayasya –piroopita mukhyatvam* I
Ibid., p.559.

[3] *"Atra Shakti triyam mukhyam sampoorna stithi kalpate I*
Anyonyoparodhena poorna poornachidaatmakam II
Tatah param tu tritayam kasyanchid gunataajushi I
Anyasyaam gunataabhaaji Yaamalam paribhashyate II
Maalini Vijaya Vaartikam I, 167- 68.
Ibid., p.559-60.

From the very beginning, the Chakreshvara sanctorum was considered as the Darabar of Devi and the general public was not allowed to interfere in the working of the Darabar with their daily presence except for special guests and on special occasions. Many luminaries of the valley like, Reshipeer Sahib of Bulbul Lankar along with his devotees and disciples venerated the Mother at her Chakreshvara abode. The Divine Mother soon prompted the hermit spiritually to correct himself with the result that he had to move to Her Po'khribala. abode along with his devotees for worshipping the Mother. Other saints like, Shri Madhav Joo Dhar, Swami Anand Ji of Jamanagri, Swami Razdan Sahib, Swami Nand Lal Ji, Bhagwan Gopi Nath Ji, Swami Balji Kaw of Ishiba'r Nishat, all have felt the presence of the Mother at Po'khribal whereas they confirmed the Chakreshvara at the Pradhyuman Peetha as the main seat of Mahashakti that could be felt only seldom or visited by the persons of high spiritual caliber and order. On all other days the devotees after paying obeisance to the Devi from the Devi Aangan premises usually started circumambulating the outer Parikrama of Hari Parbat which generally begins from the Shri Maha Ganesha temple just close to the Nowhatta gate of the outer wall of the main fort also known as Sangeen Darwaza. The construction of the temple at Chakreshvara was initiated by His Highness Maharaja Ghulab Singh after he became the ruler of the valley of Kashmir during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of the Punjab.

The devotees, entering the fort from the Sangeen Darwaza, pay their first obeisance at the temple of Maha Ganesha. A few yards ahead on the Parikrama path there exists a big boulder at the foot of the hillock known as the Shri Sapt Rishi [1]. On reaching the main Devi Aangan premises, the devotees circumambulate the stump of an old Chinar tree and adore it as the Siddha Peetha. Next they pay their salutations to the goddess at Chakreshvara. In order to complete their Parikrama of the Goddess extending over 5 Km around Hari Parbat, they start circumambulating the hillock on a small lane meant for the purpose. Close to the Siddha Peetha, and Devi Aangan the devotees pay their salutations to the Maha Kali temple also located to the right side of the path at the foot of the hillock. The temple of Mata Ha'ri is just to the extreme North of the hillock. Here, it is said that Mata Sharika took the form of a starling to fly to the Sumeru Hill for bringing a pebble for closing the doors of retreat for the demon Jalodbhava so that he could not retreat to the under world. The devotees next proceed towards Amarchand /Rama Koul's temple situated to the left of the Prikrama path. Opposite to this temple on the right side of the path is the temple of Maha Lakshmi about 150 steps above at the tail end of the hillock. The stone-stair that leads to this temple is said to have been constructed by one of Her devotees, Sh. Triloki Nath, a Postman in the State Posts and Telegraph Department. He got it constructed all by himself during the middle of the eighties of the 20th century. It is said that he spent all his meager income including his savings on this noble deed and also made some door to door collections from the devotees in the city. Just below Rama Kaul's temple there existed the shrines of Vama Dev, considered to be thirteen or fourteen in number as per the Agama Shastra of the Kashmir Shaiva Darshana [1] but now no trace of the spot or temple is found in the vicinity of this area. Turning right towards the east of the hillock, the devotees reach the abode of Mata Rajnya situated to the left of the road also known as Po'khribala. Here a beautiful temple of Rajnya is situated in the midst of a small pond, called "Amrit Kunda". 'Po'kha'r' is a Sanskrit word meaning a pond or a spring. In fact we find here three small springs of fresh water situated in a straight line. On the upper one is situated the temple of the Mother and is known as the Amrit Kunda. Just next to it is another small spring, which, besides having its own source of water is also fed by the water of the Amrit Kunda. The devotees take a bath in this spring on all the auspicious days when they visit it. Close to this is another spring that is fed by the waters of the above mentioned two springs and is known as the "Surya Kunda". It is comparatively bigger in size. People bathe in this spring at the end of the Sun/Moon (Surya/Chandra) eclipses. All the three springs are 6 feet deep when measured at the time of annual cleaning. One thing is peculiar about the spring situated at the centre. It has thick wooden planks at its base and these have remained in tact since these were first installed there and one can feel the presence of these planks when one takes a bath in this pond.[1]

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[1]. Mythologically it is said to be a group of seven principal sages/ stars, also called, "The Great Bear".

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[1] "*Rajaa Rakshsha Ratih Paalya Kaamya Trishnaa Matih Kriya I*
Riddhim Aarya cha Raatrishcha Bhaamini Mohani tathaa II
Manonmanee Kalaa Hyotaa Vaamdeve triyodashah "
Swatantra Tantra 1, 57-58: *Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Kosha*, part I, p. 598

It is one of the most venerated spots of *Mata Rajnya,* situated to the east of the Sharika Hill and on the left side of the Parikrama road. The devotees visit this shrine on every Saturday evening and sing devotional songs in praise of the goddess for the whole night. A big congregation is held on the eighth day of the ḍark half of the month of Phalguna, commonly called "Huri' Aa'tham" and a good number of devotees visit this place on this date. The word, "Huri" seems to be a direct derivation from the root Sanskrit word, "Hora", which among other things means, 'an auspicious hour' or twenty-fourth part of a day. The devotees believe that at this auspicious hour of the eighth day of the dark fortnight of Phalugana the serene form of the Mother took place and it emerged in the form of a Po'khar in the vicinity of the Hari Parbat. Besides, the scrub-cloth with which the ladies of the valley used to clean and besmear the floors and the walls of their mud-houses during the past especially on the eve of the Shiva Ratri etc., is called a "Hur". Now that all the programmes of besmearing are completed on the eve of the Shiva Ratri before the eighth day of the dark half of Phalguna, it is named as Huri Aa'tham, 'the last day of besmearing or house cleaning. [1] The word "Hur/Ho'r" also denotes the meaning of a 'couple' in Kashmiri language but with a slight phonetic change as we find in the words like 'Deji Ho'r', the ladies ear ornament, or 'Voman Ho'r', the ladles used for offering the purified butter to the Holy Fire, or 'Danda' Ho'r/Hover' a pair of oxen for the agricultural class

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[1] The information has been shared by *Shri Tej Krishen Ganjoo*, a devotee of the Mother who is deeply associated with the *Po'khribal Asthapan.* He presently resides near *Po'khribal Asthapan* at Ban Talab, Jammu.

Author.

It is reported that renovation of the present temple and all the three springs including the Amrit Kunda, was completed under the supervision of Shri. J.L Saraf, one of the devotees of the Mother, during the Dogra rule. It was later under his able guidance that a trust namely, "Bhawani Ashram, Amrit Kund Po'kharibala", was established for the maintenance of this Asthapan.

Maha Rajnya, the Divine Mother, exists here in the most highly calm and peaceful form. The devotees offer pancakes, pudding and sweets to the goddess and take the remaining portion as oblations to their homes. A big Havan was held in honour of the goddess and Bhajan Mandlis sang devotional songs for the full night on all the Saturdays and on all other auspicious days before the exodus of the Hindus from the valley and now they celebrate it at Bantalab, Jammu. To the right of the pathway is an old pit, known as Wa'ris Khanun Chah. It appears to have been got dug by some Afghan Chieftain, Waris Khan during the Pathan rule for the confinement of the hard criminals of the society. The present government has used the barracks constructed by the erstwhile rulers of the State in the vicinity of this area for the stay of the devotees and these have now provided accommodation to the Central Jail, Srinagar, Mental Hospital, Animal Husbandry Departments etc., after independence, though after certain renovations. All these are to the left side of the Parikrama road. Next, the devotees reach Kathi Darwaza. The pilgrims coming from Rainawari or Dalgate, return to their homes from this very gate. The devotees coming from the interior city take the inner road that leads them to the Ganesha temple close to the Sangeen Darwaza and from there they return to their homes.

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[1] A portion/part of a folk-song is also known as *Hur*, i.e., '*Wan-wan hur/ huri,(p.)* etc.

After the exodus of the Hindu populace from the valley in the year 1990 and onwards, the devotees of the Mother have constructed a small replica of the Mother at Bantalab, Jammu and they assemble here on all the auspicious days. Generally on all the eighth days of the bright fortnight of every month and on all Saturday-nights in particular, Bhajan Mandalis sing here the Bhajans, Kirtans and recite from the famous Shri Panchastavi in praise of the goddess. It may be recalled that the annual function on the Jayanti day of the Mother Goddess is celebrated on a grand scale on the eighth day of the dark half of the month of Phalguna when a grand night-long Havan .is performed and the devotees of the Mother are given the usual Prasad.

Vatukeshwar Bhairava Poojana
At the Shiva Ratri Mandapa

The *Nilamata Purana* contains a list of celebrations connected with the Shiva Ratri festival. It clearly states that on the completion of the twelfth and before the arrival of the fourteenth day of the dark half of the month of Phalguna one should observe complete fast after taking a bath and should worship Shiva [1]. It is further laid down that one should remove ones heavy woollens, lest they get drenched while giving a bath to Mehesha, with purified butter and a number of other ingredients. It is also stressed that Shiva may be worshipped in the same way as Hari (Vishnu) is worshipped on the Devotthana (Awakening day}, a ceremony held every year from the 11th to 15th day of the bright half of Kartika. [2] The verses that follow in the Purana, impress upon us to worship Shiva Linga with a number of ingredients at that very night and observe a fast for the whole day and perform all those rites and rituals as have been prescribed for venerating Keshava on the Devotthana occasion. The *Purana* also advocates that offerings be made to Fire and Brahmins. One should keep a vigil for the whole night and listen to the Shiva Leelas (divine acts of Shiva) and the stories connected with it. [3] The concluding three verses of the *Purana* lay more emphasis on the eatables to be offered to Shankara on this occasion and the days following the festival. The details regarding the modes of worship of Shiva on these days as contained in some verses of the *Purana* are recorded here:

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[1] *Tasyantu samateetaayam ya syath Krishna chaturdashi* *I*
Tasyam uposhitah snaatah poojiyet cha Maheshwaram *II*
Nilamata Pu., v.,527.

[2] *Dhrita kambalheenam tu lingham samsnaapyet budhah* *I*
Devotthaanavidhinokhtair dravyaishcha vidhinaa tatah II
Ibid.,v,528.

For the *Devothana* celebrations p.s. *Nilamata Pu.*,Ed.,by Dr.Ved Kumari, Pt., II., Pub., by J.& K. Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, p.,109-119, vv, 421 - 463

3. Ibid., vv, 529-30

1.Oh wise Brahmin eatables depicting animals made of flour are offered as oblation to Shankara who is also to be worshipped on the fifteenth day also.[1]

2.For worshipping the Lord on the fourteenth, the devotees should take two types of meals one consisting of half ripe barley and the other cakes of sugar covered with sesame [2]

3.The concluding verse of this chapter of the *Purana* says that one may or may not worship Rudra on the dark fourteenth of the remaining fortnights of the year but He is to be worshipped on the dark fourteenth day of this fortnight positively to attain sovereignty over the Rudra Loka .[3].

Shiva Ratri also known as 'Hayrath', 'Vatukh', Vatakeshwar/Raza', is one of the most important festivals celebrated by Kashmiri Pandits. The festivities start from the first day of the dark half of the month of 'Phalguna' and different celebrations continue for the full fortnight. The festival of Shiva Ratri is also held with the same fervor in most of the other parts of northern India especially in the Himalayan belt since times immemorial. [4] The difference is that besides celebrating it for the full fortnight, the main festival is celebrated in the valley during the thirteenth night whereas it is celebrated on the fourteenth morning in other parts of the subcontinent. This festival has actively been celebrated in Kashmir even during very ancient period and the excavations of the pots and other pottery found at Harvan and Burzahama stand a witness to this fact.

The first eight days of the fortnight are meant for house cleaning and washing clothes. It starts from the first day called 'Huri' Okdoh'.. The celebrations in the houses start from this day. The elderly ladies start cleaning and washing the house and clothes after the long spell of winter and children open their small bags containing colourful cowries for a fortnight's celebrations. The same schedule of washing and cleaning continues for a full week. Women start cleaning and besmearing the rooms and the Pooja-room for the 'Vatukh'[1] from early in the morning on the scheduled day. Young people collect/purchase fresh flowers and other scented leaves like the 'Bel' leaves of the wood apple tree, etc., and they prepare garlands of flowers and scented leaves, called 'Vuse'ri'. Small and big rings are prepared from paddy grass called, 'A'ri' that serve as the seats for the 'Vatukh and other Bhairavas'. The family members including the elder lady of the house, observes a fast on this day till the offerings are made to the deity in the evening. The place of the deity, called the 'Vatakh Kuth' is decorated with flowers, buntings and portraits of different deities. In earlier times, potters used to come with a coop of fresh clay pots. The ritual of 'Alath' (ceremonial welcome) was performed as soon as he reached the gate of the house. He would get a handsome gratification in the form of rice, cash, raw vegetables and some walnuts from the head of the family in addition to the price of the earthen pots. Due to the change in times, and consequent upon the exodus of the Hindus from the valley, people generally prefer metal pots for the purpose. The elimination of the pottery has put an end to the use of the earthen pots including the visit of the potter on this occasion.

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[1] *Paishthaacha pashvah kaarya naivedhye Shankarasya cha I*
Panchadashyam cha sampoojyas tatraapi dvijasattama II
Nilamata Pu., v.,351

[2] *Kulmaashi lopikaa mishram bhoktavyam bhojanam tadaa I*
Tasmin maase dhruvam poojyo Devah krishnachaturdasheem II
Ibid., v., 532.

[3] *Ichchhaya poojineeyah syat sheshi maaseshu vaa na vaa I*
Sampoojya Rudralokastho ghaanapatyam avaaphnuyat. II
Ibid v., 533.

[4] J.L.Handoo, *Kashmiri Aur Hindi Ke Loka Geet*, 1971p., 174.

The pots meant for the function are decorated with garlands, flowers and scented leaves. The big pitcher and the medium one are filled with walnuts of the best quality.[2] The

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[1]. The lexical meaning of the Sanskrit word, 'Vatuk or Batuk,' is a boy, a lad or a student studying religion. For more details p.s. *.Kashmir Hindu Sanskars (Rituals, Rites and Customs,)*, Year 2006, by S.N. Pandit, p. 358.

[2]. Unlike other parts of the sub-continent, where the coconut has supremacy over many other ingredients required in various ritualistic activities, walnuts are used while performing almost all the major rites and rituals in Kashmir, especially where involvement of igniting the Holy Fire is essential. The main cause of its usage may be because of the fact that this dry fruit is abundantly found in the valley and these (contd. on page 211)

ladies of the house start their chores in the kitchen and prepare all the varieties of dishes in honour of the heavenly guests, according to ones family customs and traditions. The 'Vatukh' was previously taken to the river Vitasta or to a local stream or spring for washing it and filling it with fresh water. Now taps are fitted in every kitchen of the household so the question of going to the Vitasta or to the local streams, does not arise. However, in the villages people still take the 'Vatukh' to the local stream or spring for this purpose. After washing the 'Vatukh' it is decorated with vermilion and 'Na'rivan', garlands, flowers and is kept at the place fixed for it along with other pots, according to the family traditions, on the seats of grass-rings (A'ri). All the members of the family assemble for offering collective prayers to the deity as soon as it is dark in the evening. Video cassettes and tapes, containing the 'Vatakh Pooja', are played till late in the night. Some of the devotees wait till the arrival of the Kula Guru who performs some of the necessary rituals on the occasion while others do it on their own and after making offerings to the deity according to their own family traditions, the function is concluded.

The number of utensils, decorated with flowers, Nari'van and garlands etc., used as necessary components of 'Vatukh' on the occasion, depends generally on ones own family traditions, rituals and customs. A common list of such utensils, which generally form a part of the 'Vatukh,' and are worshipped as different deities and Bhairavas accompanying Shiva's Barat, are listed below: -

1.No't.- (One), A big pitcher made of clay or metal. It represents Shakti: or Mother Goddess. It is filled with walnuts.

(contd. from page 210) are generally stored by the people for the whole year. The Hindus of the valley have also the superstitious belief that the body formation of this fruit resembles the "Maya Tatva". The outer hard crest of the fruit is considered as the "Shiva Tatva" and the inner contents, the actual fruit or four kernels pressed in its two compartments, are believed to be the "Four Vedas", and this belief has prevailed since times immemorial.

2. Tso'd/Na'r- (One). A medium sized pitcher of clay or metal representing Shiva, commonly known as 'Rama' Go'd'. This too is filled with walnuts.

3.Dul (one). A large bowl-like open mouthed pot. It represents one of the 'Bhairavas' accompanying the Baratis of Shiva. A major portion of the kitchen offerings is put into this pot.

4.Duliji' (one/two), medium size bowls. These too represent the 'Bhairavas' accompanying the Barat and receive the kitchen offerings.

5.Re'shi'/Pyala-Dul', (one). It is a cup shaped bowl. It represents the Rishi accompanying the Barat. Besides rice, It is served milk, sugar and a piece of radish, etc., according to ones family traditions and customs. It is considered to be completely a vegetarian Barati who is neither to be served any cooked vegetables nor any non-vegetarian food except milk, sugar, etc.,

6.Vari (Four) small containers (toy pots). Two of these are called 'Sanivari' and all the four pots represent the Baratis. One walnut in each is kept in these till they are served with the share of the kitchen offerings.

7.Small spouted container pots, called 'Nayi Vari'[1] (two.) These represent members of the marriage party and are given offerings as usual.

8.A stand for burning incense, called, 'Dupa-Zuve'r/Zoor' is used for burning the incense, etc.

9.An earthen lamp is kept lighted for all the days of the festival. Oil is used in it for this purpose.

10.A lamp with a stand called 'Ratan Deep' is lighted at the time of offering prayers. Purified butter is used to light this lamp.

11.A big earthen saucer called, 'To'k' is made use of while kindling charcoal / Holy Fire to make offerings to the deity and some small earthen plates called, 'Parva' are used for burning Camphor, etc.

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[1] These small pots, besides being called "Nayi vari" are also named as 'Na>r',(s). or 'Nari' (plu.,) and 'Gang'ji' –for smaller ones and 'Ganga Sagar', for the big ones. All these words 'vari', 'Gangj'i'/ Ganga Sagar are related to "water" and originate from the Sanskrit root word "Vari" meaning 'water'.

12. Sani Po'tul [1] .It is a pointed Linga: shaped pot with a stand. It is the main item of worship on the occasion. It is worshipped with water, milk, curds and flowers, known as 'Go'd Dyun': It has the same place in the Shiva worship on this day, as is the importance of a 'Saligrama' [2] in the worship of Lord Vishnu.

Now that it is prominently worshipped on this day, it appears that the original word has undergone a slight phonetic change and is pronounced as 'Sani Po'tul' in the Kashmiri language as is prevalent in the case of the 'Sani Vari' referred to above .[3] Some of the Kashmiri Hindu families remain completely vegetarian for all the four days of the festival especially from the tenth day to the fourteenth day of the fortnight. They are known as "Gura'ti'" in the Kashmiri Hindu society. [1] Their rituals differ only on Shiva Ratri so much so that they don't allow their neighbours (vegetarian or non-vegetarian) and all those who are not of their creed to enter their houses on all the four days of this worship. Some of these families prepare non-vegetarian dishes on the last fifteenth day of the dark half of Phalguna generally known 'Dooni' Mavas.', which is also nicknamed as Da'mbani Ma'vas.

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[1] The word, 'Sanni' is a prefix used in Sanskrit language that intensifies the meaning of the word that follows it, as in 'Sannipaat', 'San-nidaan' ,'San-nikat;' 'San-nivesh' so on and so forth and Po'tul seems a direct derivation from the Sanskrit word 'Putla', meaning an effigy or an image of the deity that we worship. Some consider it as a derivation from the words, 'Smridhi Putla', meaning 'the image of prosperity, happiness and wealth'.

[2] The lexical meaning of the word 'Saligrama' is a resident of 'Saa'li/ Shaali', a village on the banks of the river Gauda in the *Gaud Pargana* of West Bengal. This area has been described in our *Puranas* as the land falling between *Bangdesh* (Bengal) up to the *Bhuvanesh*, (Bhuvaneshwara) :-

Bangadesham samaaranbhya Bhovaneshaantagah shive,
Gaudadeshah samaakhyatah sarva vidhya visharadah II
Vayu Purana.

There is a village in the valley, named 'Sa>li' close to Mattan in district Anantnag which, besides having a good population of Kashmiri Hindus had a separate Mohalla comprising specifically the Gur'it Razdans/Rainas who resided there prior to the present exodus of Hindus from the valley in the year 1990 and onwards.

Author

[3] . For more details p.s..*Kashmir Hindu Sanskars* (Rituals, Rites and Customs,) by S.N. Pandit, year, 2006, pp.,.358,(f.n.), 360-61,430-31.

Morning and evening prayers are held in every home on each day after the night of Shiva Ratri till its final Pooja or farewell on the evening of the fourth and final evening called Vatukh Paramoozun. [2] In case Shiva Ratri is held on the 12th day evening of the fortnight, the Paramoozun function takes place on the following Amawasya otherwise the function is held on the first day of the bright half of the month of Phalguna in the evening and Naived is distributed in the form of rice-flour pan-cakes and walnut-kernels to one and all in the family, neighbours, friends and relatives

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[1] In our past history it is recorded that a group of Vaishnava Gaud Brahmins also came to Kashmir from Bengal like the Saraswat Brahmins, who came from the Northern planes of India in the accompaniment of Kashyapa; and who in the long run, stayed back in the valley. As Pishachi was the language of Gaud people, and Pishachi was also prevalent in the valley of Kashmir, which must have been the cause of attraction for these people. In the *Krityakalpaturu,* Lakhmidhara has stated that there have been eleven Pishachi speaking ares in Bharat and Gaud is one among them: He says:

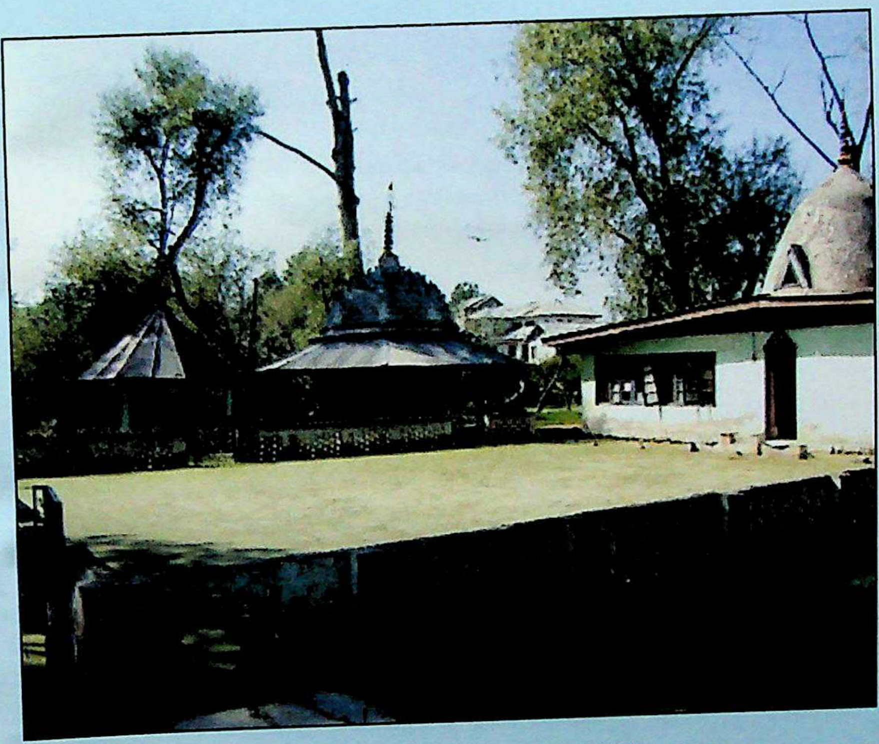
Kanchi desheeya Paandya cha Paanchaala Gauda Maagdham I
Dravidam Daakshinaatyam cha Shaurasenam cha Kaikayam II
Shaabaram Dravidam chaiva ekaadasha Pishaachikaah I
Kratya Kalpaturu,

It appears that with the passage of time this purely vegetarian group of Gaud Brahmins assumed the changed name of Gure't. Besides, the great Sanskrit grammarian of Kashmir, Vishva Nath, the author of *Sahitya Darpan,* had studied Gaudi language and he has grouped its poetic styles in the following words,

Ojah prakaashkairvarnair bandhaadambara punah Samaasabahula; Gaudi I
Sahitya Darpan, 617,

[2] On this occasion the metal/ clay pots used during the pooja days, are placed back at their original place in the store while some families retain the two small pots, "Saniwari" in the kitchen room and worship them daily there till the next Shiva Ratri festival.

For more details p.s..*Kashmir Hindu Sanskars* (Rituals, Rites and Customs,) by S.N. Pandit, year, 2006, pp., 358-362 and 430-31.



Temple Shrine at Vicharnag, Srinagar

17. Navareh Mavas

The Concluding Day of the Year.

The concluding day of the Vikrami Year is considered as one of the most auspicious days which the people of the valley celebrate at Vicharnag, Srinagar, commonly called 'Vyatsar Nag', on the fifteenth day of the dark half of the month of Chaitra, "Amavasya", at this famous tirtha of the valley. It is said that during the Hindu rule over the valley of Kashmir, astrologers and astronomers were invited from all over the valley to assemble at this tirtha to discuss their individual astrological calculations in detail and thus arrive at a consensus and unanimous decision for preparing a general or a common calendar, Panchang, 'Jantari' or 'Nechhipata'r', as the almanac is called in the Kashmiri language, for the coming year to be used by the masses uniformly. The deliberations thus made, are termed as 'Vichar' in Sanskrit language, hence, the place took the name 'Vichar/ Vyatsar Nag'.

There is a mention of Ailapatra Nag in the *Nilamat Purana* and Shrivara in the *Tirtha Sangraha* has confirmed the abode of Ailapatra Nag at the sacred spot of Vichar Nag and this has been described by Stein, M. A. while editing the *Rajatarangini* of Kalhan. Dr Ved Kumari Ghai, while editing the *Nilamata Purana*, Vol 1st has confirmed this fact [1]. Though the old importance and grandeur of the place has vanished with the end of the Hindu rule over the valley, still the Hindus of the valley celebrate this day at the holy spring of the deity even today. There are two springs at the Asthapan at Vicharnag. The small one is five–six feet deep and is known as 'Do'da Po'kha'r' for its water is white like milk. The word 'Po'kha'r' is a Sanskrit word and means a small tank of water. This small spring of sweet water is approximately 8'x 8' in area at its mouth. The bigger tank known as "Naga'bal', is situated to its west. It has a flight of steps on its southern and western sides made of large stone slabs. The standing walls to its east and north are made of the same big blocks of stone and a few portions are filled with smaller black stone slabs, engraved with beautiful figures of various deities. To its north is a small recently built temple and to its west is an old stone temple, which has a small stream flowing on its back side. The banks of the stream are flanked by a number of old ruins and stone slabs which stand a witness to its ancient grandeur. Nearly two hundred meters away, to the north of the temple, is a cluster of ruins on the bank of this stream presently known as, 'Wokhal Van'. It appears a changed from of the old Sanskrit word 'Utpala Vana'. The great Sanskrit scholar and Shaiva philosopher of Kashmir, 'Utpaladeva' (900-950 A, D.) is said to have been a resident of this place. Approximately 200 meters away to the south of 'Nagabal and close to the Srinagar – Ganderbal main road', is one more 'Po'kha'r' named 'Mo'khta' Po'kha'r'. This whole area is surrounded by a cluster of old ruins comprising big stone slabs and curves that stand a testimony to its ancient glory. Though a major part of this treasure is either buried deep or has been used in the reconstruction of some new edifice. This fact has correctly been recorded by Stein, M. A., while translating and editing the *Rajatarangini* of Kalhana. He also has expressed his opinion that the name 'Mukhtamulaknag' or 'Mo'khta Po'khar' as mentioned in the '*Tirtha Sangraha*': of Shrivara, are one and the same places. Stein has further confirmed that the ruins near the outlet of the Dal-lake towards the Aanchar-lake, in the vicinity of this area, are of some ancient temples now converted into Ziarats and tombs[1]

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[1] *Nilamata Pu*..,v., 916' Shrivara, *Tirthasangraha*, iv., p. 65; Stein, M.A., *Rajatarangini, vol II, p.457.* : Dr. Ved Kumari, *Nilamata Pu*., Vol , I, p.38.

During the medieval period a great son of the valley, Shri Shriya Bhat (1400-1459 A.D.) lived here, who served the famous Sultan Zain-ul-Abidine of Kashmir without any selfish considerations and cured him of a serious boil and thus succeeded in changing his mind and made him more generous towards the suffering Hindu populace of the valley. It was due to his strenuous efforts that the king invited back into the valley the people who had migrated to other parts of the sub-continent due to the repressions of the earlier rulers and he got them settled in their

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Stein. M. A. *Rajatarangini* (Rep. 1979), Vol. II, p.. 455.

ancestral homes. Though Shriya Bhat, the virtuous friend of the suffering masses, died young yet the impact of his generous services to his community as a whole are remembered by the people of the valley to this date. His descendents lived at *Vichharnag* till the recent exodus of the Hindus from the valley in the year 1990.

The western and the southern sides of the main spring, 'Nagabala' contain the steps made of very big lime stone- slabs measuring more than six feet in length and four by four feet in breadth and height. These continue up to the depth of nearly 50 feet to the bottom of the spring. Thus these four feet big standing slabs form a stair to reach to of the bottom of the spring. At its bed there appears a single big slab measuring nearly 8' x 8' feet that covers the bottom of the spring and at its center there is a Shiva Lingam, on a three feet high pedestal 'Bhadra Peetha' of approximately two feet diameter, known as 'Vyatsar Sa'b'. There are a number of big, small and very small pieces of beautiful sculptures over a raised platform on the eastern side of the spring but no body dares to take them out for installation in the temple, because such an act has been prohibited by the deity himself as is believed by the local Hindu population that lived there till recently. Water comes gushing out from the north and east sides of the spring when it is drained for cleaning the pond. Those who visit this place on the day of the pilgrimage pay their reverence to the deity in both the temples situated to the north and west sides of the spring.

The *Nilamata Purana*, names the last Amavasya (fifteenth dark fortnight) of Chaitra Krishna as the Antim Amavasya of the year and names it as the closing 'Samvatsara'. The compiler of the *Purana,* while discussing the activities of the devotee on the concluding Amavasya of the year, includes performing Shraaddha of the manes and offering of food to the dogs as per one's wishes.[1] Now no such rituals are held on this occasion.

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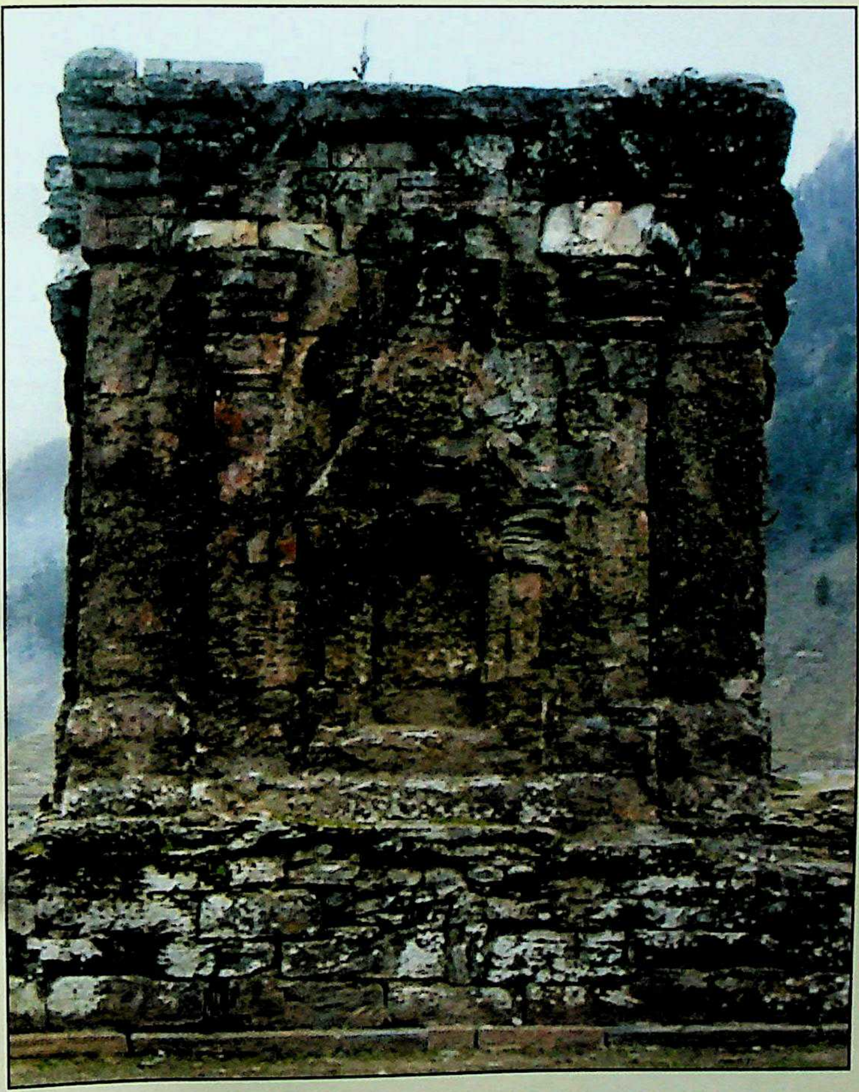
[1] *Tatah panchadasheem praapya cha antyam Samvatsarasya tu* I
Shraaddham kritva pradaatavyam shunaam annam yadechikam II
Nilamata Pu., v. 582.

A few decades earlier when modern facilities of transport were not available, the devotees visited the famous shrines of Tulamula and Hara Mukata Ganga on foot. Vicharnag was considered as the first meeting and resting place more close to the city of Srinagar and the people rested here for the night and planned for their onward journey especially in the case of the Hara Mukuta Ganga pilgrimage, considered to be one of the longest and the most tedious pilgrimages in the valley of Kashmir.

Till the exodus of the Hindus from the valley of Kashmir in the year 1990 and onwards, thousands of people visited this place on the concluding day of the Samvatsara and took a bath in the springs for making their new year more joyful. In the evening, a large plate 'Thal' of rice that, among other things, contained rice, walnuts,(equal to the number of the family members), a morsel of cooked rice, curd, milk, a mirror, a pen, the new calendar (Almanac), called 'Nechhipate'r', a picture of Mother goddess known as 'Kroola' Pachh' some almond-blossoms or flowers, some blades of fresh grass, a blade of a herbal plant, called Vai and a coin. The process of putting all these things in a 'Thali', is called 'Thal Barun,' and this process is completed late in the night on Navareh Amavasya and the custom to see it on the next morning, the 'New Year's Day' is considered as most auspicious. 'Navareh,' means, 'new energy', and looking at all these things on the New Year Day's morning, is called, 'Buth Wuchhun'. It is believed that the sight of this 'Thal', containing all these items of our daily use is an auspicious omen on the occasion of the New Years' Day. It may be recalled that the 'Saptarshi', calendar of Kashmir starts from the first day of the bright half of 'Chaitra' and we have documented evidence of this practice being in vogue for the last fifty one centuries.

We extend our greetings of the New Year's Day "Navareh" to all our brethren in which ever part of the globe they have been forced to live due to the recent exodus from the valley and wish them all prosperity, joy and contentment on this auspicious day every year.



Sharada Temple at Haramukta Ganga Tirtha

18. *Ganga Ashtami*

The Pilgrimage to Haramukata Ganga

King Gonanda enquires from his councilor, Brihadashva in the *Nilamata Purana* to tell him the story about the birth of Nandi, the ride of Shiva, who was born in this world of humans as the son of Shilada, a Brahman by caste. Brihadashva informs Gonanda that Shilada, an idol maker, was once breaking a rock and while doing so the rock broke up and a handsome baby came out of it. He took the baby as a gift from God and he nursed him as his own son. The baby grew up as a very good natured and a handsome boy and Shilada was greatly pleased with his childish sport. He completed all his birth rites and Sanskars as if he were his own son. At the time of completing the birth rites of the boy, the Purohits gave him the name of "Nandi". At that moment Brahman Shilada heard from the twice born, performing the Sanskars of the boy, that he was short lived. This made the poor Shilada very sad and he met the child always with wet eyes. The sorrowful attitude of the father made a deep impression in the mind of the little boy and he vowed to appease Lord of the Lords, Shankara so that he could get the boon of long life from Him. Thus, he went to the Haramukata peak in the Himalayan Range, close to the Kalodaka Lake and engrossed himself in deep penance. He entered into the water of the lake and placed a big rock on his head while uttering the name of Rudra. The Nilamata says that he remained in the water for a period of one hundred years reciting the name of Lord Shankara [1].

One day Lord Shiva, while he was at Varanasi, was moved by the resolve of Nandi and his deep penance in the Kalodhaka Lake. Goddess Parvati too had expressed Her concern at the hard penance of Nandi for such a long period and She expressed Her concern to the Lord. Both of them felt that their most favourite Gana was absorbed in deep penance at the lake bed and that too under the load of a rock for a period of more than one hundred years. Both were disturbed for the long absence of their most favourite Gana, Nandi. Thus they started their north-ward journey towards Kashmir so as to liberate their Gana from the long penance.

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[1] *Nilamata Pu.*, vs., 1080 – 1168

The *Nilamata* gives the description, location and the importance of a number of Tirthas like Prayaga, Ayodhya, Gangadwara, Kurukshetra and Vishnupada, etc., that are enroute Varanasi to the valley of Kashmir. On their way the godly couple crossed a number of rivers like the Shatadru (Satluj), the Vipasha (Bias), the Irawati, the Devika, the Chandrabhaga (Chinab) and finally the Vitasta at the famous Vijiyesh Tirtha. They reached to Sangam Tirtha where the Sindhu, a small rivulet of the valley, meets the Vitasta River at the famous tirtha named in the *Vitasta Mahatmya* as Prayag and also known as Shadipur. Here the small rivulet, locally known as Krankanadi (Kanaknadi) arising from the Kaundanya Sara meets the Vitasta. The *Nilamata Puran* says that the stream got the changed name of Kaundanya for having emerged from the Kaundanya Sara [1]

It is a fact that the endless literary treasures that the valley of Kashmir has produced in the remote past, have named a number of our rivers and rivulets as the Ganga. In order to keep the narration to the point and effective, the *Nilamata Purana* has specifically named the Sindhu, a rivulet of the valley locally called 'Synd/Ganga ', so that it is not confused with the great river Indus that passes through the major portion of the North-Western area of the sub-continent. Instead it is a small rivulet that comes down from the Naubandhana Mountain peaks and is joined by another rivulet Kanakvahani or Hiraniyanee, (the names exist in verse 1159, of *Nilamata Purana)*. It emerges from the mountain range near Baltal and then it makes a steep turn towards the North-West to join the Vitasta River at Shadipur. The *Naubandhana Mahatmya* (Manuscript), preserved at

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[1] *Vasatistatra Naagasya Kaundyanasya yadaa tadaa* I
Kaundinyasara itieva tasya naama pakirtiatam II
Nilamata Pu. V. 1320

Naubandhana Mahat. R.N.Temp. Mss.Library No:3665 Jna folio, 42, a,b.

Shri Raghunath Temple Library, Jammu has described its waters white like milk and has named this rivulet as Shvetaganga.[1]

Thus a confluence of Kanaknadi ‘the rivulet with the golden coloured water’ and the Shvetaganga, the local ‘Ganga., with the white coloured water’ meet here. Besides giving a long account of the river Vitasta after its confluence with the Sindhu, the *Purana* has discussed the mythological account regarding the origin of the Sindhu River. It clearly states that the Ganga (Sindhu) is the daughter of Tapan Rishi who was bound by the affection and love of the said sage that it took the form of a rivulet so as to help Vitasta in eliminating the sins of the people of this beautiful land after the demon Jalodhbhava was killed by Vishnu.[2]

In this way Shiva and Parvati reach close to the Bharatgiri where the famous Tirtha of Shiva Bhutesh is located The people of the valley call this Mountain ‘Buthisher” due to its steep incline and the pilgrims to the Gangbal Tirtha, confirm this fact on their pilgrimage to this tirtha.

Kalhana has made a special mention of this hillock, ‘Buthisher’ in a number of verses in his *Rajatarangini*, especially when he makes reference to the Gangabal pilgrimages. [3] The *Nilamata Purana* also confirms the steepness of this mountain and gives a description of this event of the journey of Shiva and Parvati in the following words:

Keeping the arduous climbing of the mountain in view, Shiva asked Parvati and Nandi, (the bull) to wait for Him at the foot of the hill till He returned from the voyage of liberating Nandi from the Kalodhaka Lake. Fatigued due to the long journey both of them virtually agreed to this proposal put forth

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[1] *Tasmaath ksheernadi punya Shvetagangaa vinirmita* I
The *Naubandhana Mahatmya,* Shri Raghunath Temple MSS Library,
Jammu, Ms. , No: 3665 Jnya, folio, 42 a.

[2] *Tapanasya sutaa Devi Gangaa snehena yantritaa* I
Bahumaanaar Muner bhaktya svena amshena vyavardhyat II
Vitastaam tu sarit shreshthaam sarva kalmashi naashinim I
Gangaa Sindustu vijyeyaa Vitastaa Yamunaa ththaa II
Nilamata Pu , vs ., 305 -06

[3] *Rajatarangini* by Kalhana, Book,I,v.107, Book,V,v.,55, Book,viii,v.,2756.

by Shiva [1]. A number of stories are also connected with the mountain Mahadeva that describe its steepness. 'Hara'mo'khuk Goso'ni', is one such story stating that a hermit, on his voyage to the Haramukata peek climbed this mountain for the whole day. Tired, he slept midway for the night to find himself at the bottom of the mountain next morning. The *Nilamata Purana* narrates a similar trick of this trickster mountain for its deceitful play with Shiva. As much swiftly Mahesha climbed the mountain so much additional height it gained so as to prolong the stay of Shiva on the mountain. Mahesha came to know of the deeds of the trickster and being angry, He assumed a terrible form and gave the mountain a stroke on its peak with his foot with the result that the mountain peak got parted with a depression at the centre and it assumed the name of Mundaprishtha then onwards. A lake of sweet and clear water was formed on this part of the peak and it is known as Brahama-sara/Sarovara. Shiva crossed this lake between the gaps caused due to the partition of the peak assuming the form of a Swan. It is, as such, known by the name of Hamsa'dvara (the gateway of the Swans) as well. After crossing the Hamsa'dvara, Shiva was greeted by Brahma and a host of other gods including Indra and Dharmaraja. The gods, assuming the form of swans, had brought Parvati and the ride of Shiva to this place so as to witness the spectacle of liberating Nandi from his deep penance at the bed of the Kalodhaka Lake also known as Ganga'bala by the people of the valley. Shiva bestowed him (Nandi) a permanent place on the Haramukata peak by His side close to the Brahamasara (Brahamasarovara) after he was liberated by Shiva in the presence of Brahma and all other gods.

The importance of this tirtha lies in the fact that its varied names are recorded since times immemorial in various treatises of immense historical importance. One more story is connected with this tirtha which the pilgrims relate after they complete this arduous and tedious pilgrimage. It is said that on

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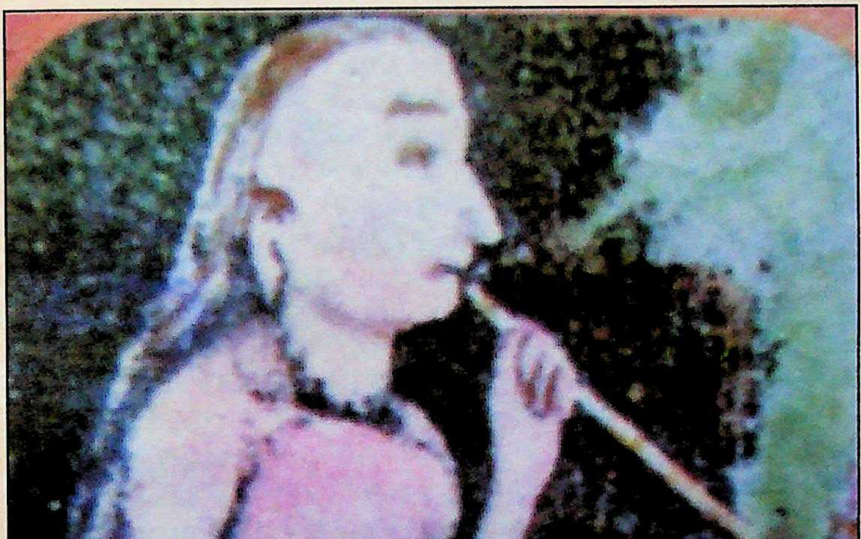
[1] *Etaan sarvaan atikramya prayayou Bharatam girim II*
Pathaa tvam na samarthaasi sukumaaraasi Devi yat I
Aarodum tena yasyehamekam evadhya satvarah II
Nilamata Pu.,vs., 1096 (b) 1099



Swami Jivan Sahib, Kashmir

the day of Bhadra Shokla Ashtami the pilgrims reach this holy tirtha on the banks of the Brahamasarovara at Haramukata Ganga, the water of the lake is fresh and clean and the pilgrims use this water for drinking and preparation of their meals, etc. But once they bathe in the lake after tonsuring for performance of the Shraaddha of their manes, the whole lake-water becomes impure for human use and is filled with multitude of small worms and insects soon after they take a bath in it and immerse their hair into the lake.

The eighth day of the bright half of 'Bhadrapada' is celebrated as 'Ganga Ashtami' A pilgrimage known as 'Haramukata Ganga Yatra' or ' Ganga'bal Yatra, is held at 'Ganga'bal' on this date. It is one of the far flung areas of Handwara District and the last habitation on this mountainous pilgrimage is at 'Naran Nag'. The Hindus of the valley and from a few parts of the sub-continent call it, 'Ba'd Ganga' and perform the 'Tirtha Shraaddha' of their manes here and till recently immersed the ashes of their dead into the 'Gangabal' lake. The *Rajatarangini* records the presence of a big temple of 'Bhuteshvara' or 'Shiva Bhutesh" here. A period of long political instability and devastation has left no mark of any such existence here. It is said that Ashoka the Great, got here the boon of a son from Shiva Bhutesh after a great penance [1], but the remains of the temple and that of the idol are no longer to be seen here now. Besides, due to the division of the sub-continent, this pilgrimage remained suspended for a considerable time because of its location close to the Line of Control, (LOC). However, with the strenuous efforts of the Hindus who migrated from the valley to other parts of the sub-continent and abroad and with the moral support of the State Government and due to the intervention of Govt., of India, this Yatra has been re-started since a few years back and people have now started visiting Ganga'bal tirtha on its scheduled date under tight Government security.

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[1] *Nilamata Pu.*, vs. 1090 – 1168, *Rajtarangini* by Kalhana, book 1st, v. 107-113, and also *History of Kashmir*, II Ed. 1973, by Bamzai, P.N.K, P. 68.

Chapter iv,

Our Luminaries

A luminary is one who is intellectually or morally luminous and celestial, or a person who enlightens his whole surroundings with his moral uprightness, spirituality, intellectuality, creative intelligence and so on. He should be a person of such moral eminence, who inspires or is capable of inspiring others on coming into contact with them. Luminaries are super-human personalities who can think or see beyond time and space. They have the ability to change and mend the future course of the society to which they belong. There have been such persons almost in all human societies of the world to guide people, lest they should stray from the path of truth and morality.

It is worthwhile to mention here that Kashmir has been a great seat of learning in the whole sub-continent since ancient times and a number of such luminaries were born and lived in the valley, who are considered even today as the masters in the fields of different branches of learning. Our seers and saints have excelled in almost all branches of learning in the past and it is true even now. The whole of the valley of Kashmir attained the name of *Sharada* Desha – the land of *Sharada,* the goddess of Wisdom and Learning. Scholars from far-flung areas of the sub-continent came to the *Sharada Peetha*, the famous Seat of Learning and studied various branches of knowledge at the feet of great scholars in the said *Peetha. Pandit Kalhana, Bilhana, Ratnakara, Jonraja, Jayaratha, Shrivara ,Mamat, Abhinavagupta, Utpaladeva ,Mankha, Vasugupta, Pandit Rajanaka Rattana Kantha, Kshemendra, Kshemraja, Ananda Vardhana, Somdeva, Somananda, Varadaraja, Bhatta Kalatta* and many others are some of the luminaries of the 1st millennium who illuminated various branched of learning. There have been great changes in the thinking patterns of people world over with the advent of the modern age. The people of the valley, while adopting new patterns of life, continued to walk on the path of truthfulness and divinity which is the ultimate goal of an enlightened human society. The stream of scholars that continued unrestrained and that radiated the path of wisdom for the people of the valley during the second millennium is most significant. The cluster of scholars and thinkers like, *Shitikantha, Lalleshwari, Nunda Rishi, Sahib Koul, Rupa*

Bhawani, Paramananda, Krishen Joo Razdan, Rahman Dar, Samad Mir, Swochi Kral, Wahab Khar, Ahad Zargar, and a long list of saints, seers and philosophers that include *Bhagwan Gopi Nath Ji* and *Shaivacharya, Swami Lakshman Joo Maharaj* and other such luminaries that continue to guide people of the valley about the real values of life, is still shining un-abated and with full vigour. The people of the valley have always considered saintliness next to godliness. We consider the words uttered by these saints and seers as "*Amrit Wani*" – the 'Divine Thoughts' and we look for different shades and meanings of our *Shaivișm* and *Dharama Shastra* in every word and every line written for us by these seers. The people of the valley have always given a high respect and honour to such luminaries that we have named this land as the *Reshi Wa'r* – 'the garden of the seers and saints.' Isn't it a miracle that the *Vakhs* of *Lalleshwari*, a fourteenth century luminary of Kashmir, have traveled orally all these centuries like our great *Shrutis* and *Smritis* till these were collected by Pandit Makund Ram Shastri in the year 1914, who rendered these Vakhs into the Devanagari transcription and R.L. Stein, under whose able guidance these were finally published in a written form with his English translation? Much has been written about almost all the luminaries of our past and present times in a number of languages that include English, Urdu, Hindi, Sanskrit, and Kashmiri. In view of this addition of a few names has been made in the foregoing chapter to include some more prominent names who, besides being great in themselves, have illuminated the horizons of our valley in the recent past and have given a right direction to our society.

On our recent exodus from the valley of Kashmir, the Kashmiri Pandits took along with them the great legacy of Kashmir left behind by these seers and saints and constructed numerous commemorative places close to their residences and replica of temples left behind in the valley throughout the length and breadth of the country where ever they settled. They hold big congregations on the anniversaries (both, *Jayanti* and *Nirvan* days) of these seers and saints for the propagation and preservation of their teachings that had remained confined to a select population of the valley and which is now obtaining currency among all the members of this displaced community.

Swami Nand Bab Sahib

1. Swami Nand Bab

Mysticism helps understanding Ultimate Reality and the Divine Thought that can be gained either by spontaneous intuition or by a concerted effort of the mind absorbed completely in the Divine that in the long run leads one to spiritual enlightenment. The souls thus awakened display normal human behaviour while proceeding further on this path of attaining higher spiritual goals till the stage of non-attachment with the material world is reached. Herc the roads to reach higher spiritual realms change the course of the life of the seekers and such seekers either become extroverts or complete introverts. The path of devotion unto Him is manifold but the basics for such attainment are eternal and universal. As the devotee gets further on this path, there invariably comes a stage when he is held up at a crossing. He turns either to be an introvert or becomes an extrovert. In the case of the former state, he feels his own self to be subordinate to social, religious and ethical bindings that become a restrictive force for his actions with the result that he turns inwards and remains almost quite and silent. On the other hand no such barriers exist when one becomes an extrovert, a borderline lunatic. He has no religious, social bindings or the ethical bindings to restrain his spiritual progress. For him the whole world and its people are a single family, (*Vasudaiva Kutumbakam.*).A luminary of such a great repute was Swami Nand Bab Ji Maharaj, a legendry mystic saint of Kashmir of the latter order, who's Punya Tithi (Nirvan) we celebrate on the thirteenth day of the bright half of Ashwin every year. It was due to his exceptional ecstatic nature that we called him "Nanda Mo't" out of love, regard and respect.

He was born on the tenth day of dark fortnight of Posha (1896) at Purushyar, Habakadal, Srinagar, in the house of Shankar Nath Sahib. He did not continue his formal education beyond Matriculation, though till then he had obtained a good knowledge of English, Urdu, Sanskrit and Persian languages. He proved to be a master calligraphist even at a very young age. Ya'mberzal, his mother, being a pious and religious minded lady handed over the young Nand Lal Ji to her sister and brother-in-law, who resided at Nunar, Kashmir for she thought that the detachment from the parental love and house might bring some change in the mind of the young boy. But this did not happen. Instead the boy was now nearer to the abode of Mata Rajnya, at Tulmula, that he often visited and where he even stayed for nights together. The seeds of devotion sprouted forth in his young heart at the very young age and he would feel more comfortable in the company of saints, Sadhus and in seclusion than in the company of his parents/relatives, friends and common people. Shankar Nath, who was an employee of the State Police Department, got disturbed with the attitude of his son, so he got him employed in the State Police Department as a Munshi for he was a good calligraphist in Urdu. He was posted at the City Central Jail, Hari Parbath, Srinagar, located in the vicinity of the abodes of Mother Sharika and Rajnya. To the east of the Hari Parbat hillock, is Chakreshvara and to the west is Po'khribala, the abodes of Mata Shariuka and Rajnya. The young spiritual aspirant would devote most of his time at the feet of the Universal Mother and attend to his official duties only seldom, with the result, the Police Department had no alternative but to dispense with his services, when all their efforts failed to bring him round. Till now he had attained the Divine Perfection with clear mystic vision and foresight. So he left his job and he started his career as a Petition Writer. Here too, during the course of his work the open mind of the seer felt ity on a petitioner who had falsely been involved in a murderer case and while writing his appeal he also recorded his judgment on it. The annoyed judge passed the judgment of imprisonment on the Petition Writer. But the Mother Goddess came to the judge in his dream at night and apprised him of the facts and asked him to set the Petitioner free. Thus the Sadhana of the saint became public with the result that he abandoned this profession too and left for an unknown destination. After a long time he again resurfaced but not as Nand Lal Ji but as a different person in tattered clothes, with unclean and shabby-looking long un-shaven hair and long beard.

He was now Nanda Mo't for the common people. It is said that during this wandering, one of his earlier admirers, Srikanth Mahnoori, took him to his residence and did all that the Mastana asked him to do at that time. He got him shaved first and then asked him to take a bath and change his clothes. Cleanly dressed, he himself felt delighted. He was feeling very tired and exhausted due to his past Sadhana and seclusion for a pretty long time. A warm pat of Mr. Mahnoori was so soothing to Bab Ji that he remained in that house for as long as twenty years completely absorbed in his spiritual pursuit. The people, who give up their homes and hearths to seek His grace, consider all beings on this earth as members of a single family and try their utmost to render their selfless service to them expecting nothing in return. They bestow their spiritual grace and sow the seeds of spirituality all over for the betterment of human beings and keep the torch of spirituality burning for future generations. Saints of this order are free from the bonds of time and space. They can do and undo things for the betterment of the needy.

To serve humanity, Swami Nandlal Ji became a wandering saint. He had unique attraction in his saintliness, dress, looks, speech and thinking. In the later part of his life he would not stay anywhere for a longer time instead kept wandering as a missionary. A man of graceful and stout body, he dressed himself as an army officer with a belt and a sward tied to his waist. He used to wear a hat and long boots. The handsome broad shouldered person, as he was, with a divine look and radiant face, he always expressed himself authoritatively as if commanding some unknown and invisible forces. Sometimes he would keep a cracked bamboo staff in one of his hands and a bundle of paper called, "Parvanas", which he would write in his own pithy words with the pen that he always kept on one of his ears. His small bag, which he always kept pressed under his left arm, contained some holy books, like the Bhagavad-Gita, the Quran, the Bible and the Guru Granth Sahab. He always wore the Sacred Thread, Yajnyopavita, occasionally under his left arm and generally under the right one.

During all this period he had attained the highest place of perfection and had mastered the secrets of the occult. His fame spread far and wide and people irrespective of their caste, colour, creed, position and religion assembled at his appearance to get his favour. His dealings with the general public were often strange and quite indifferent. To bestow his favour he would give a good thrashing to some with his hand/stick and the devotees would gladly accept such a harsh treatment. For some he would make most accurate prophecies with handing over a "Parvana" in his own mystic language. He was approached by one and all alike. His devotees included the then Prime/ Chief Ministers of the State and their Cabinet colleagues. Be it administrators or peons, the moneyed landlords/ businessmen or the common labourers, he showered his blessings on one and all alike, like the rising sun in the morning.

In October 1973, the enlightened soul felt restless to join the Eternal Light so much so that his legs got paralyzed and could not follow his command. His trusted and affectionate devotees took him to All India Medical Institute, New Delhi for treatment but the shining star that had risen on the horizon of the valley of Kashmir was very eager to join the Ultimate Reality. On 24th October, 1973 he attained Nirvan. His mortal remains were brought to the valley and kept at the famous Ashram (Asthapan) at "Shivalun", Chota Bazar, Srinagar, to enable the devotees to pay their last respects to the Swami and have the last Darshana of his mortal remains. In this way a saga of a mystic tradition came to an end with the amalgamation of the pious soul with the Eternal Reality.

Earlier he had desired in 1968 to initiate a social organization, "Omkar Samiti" and his disciples had accordingly established Nand Bab Samiti at Srinagar, which till now has developed into a well established Ashram flourishing at Laley Da Bagh, Jammu, under the patronage of his devoted disciples after the exodus of the Hindus from the valley of Kashmir. Big Havans are held with great respect and devotion by his devotees on the dark tenth day of the month of Pausha and on the thirteenth day of the bright half of the month of Ashwin at a number of places like Srinagar, Jammu and Delhi every year on the Jayanti and Nirvan days of Swami Ji, respectively.

2. Swami Jivan Sahib

There is a beautiful health resort at the foot of the famous and centrally located hill, Vastervana, known as Laduva situated to the north-east of Pampore just opposite the Jwala Parbat at Khrew. The hill is known as Veshrivan to the scholars of our ancient chronicles and is said to be a place with which are connected many myths and legends known to the people who live in its vicinity. People who live in its vicinity believe that their ancestors used to get many items of their day to day needs like tea, salt, medicinal herbs, some metals like iron and even gold from it. The village has remained a seat of learning of Shaivism, Buddhism and Vaishnavism during our glorious past and the broken fragments of the fine stone slabs, curbs and the ruins of the ancient monuments scattered over a large area of the village bear testimony to it. The area of these ruins, presently known as Samsa'ri'/ Sankarshan Nag, is also known as Gosa'ni' Nag, perhaps due to the fact that saints and seers often visited this place for religious and other discourses. The shrine of the famous Shakti-upasak, His Holiness Jivan Sahib, who is said to have erected 18 feet high platform where he kept the Holy Fire, "Dhooni" lighted during the later period of his life that he spent in the lap of this beautiful valley, is said to have attained his spiritual ascention in the seclusion of this hilly resort. With the arrival of this spiritually awakened giant, this village regained its past glory and became a place of pilgrimage for his Kashmiri devotees since the second half of the eighteenth century. In the vicinity of this village there is a cave where the famous Sufi saint, Nunda Rishi did his penance for a long time and close to the shrine of Jivan Sahib, resided the famous Sufi poet, Wahab Khar on the Khrew-Shar road.

The account of the saint contained in the Sant Mala, Pts, I and II, tell that Jivan Sahib was born at Rainawari, Srinagar in the house of Raja Kak Pandit. In fact the Pandit family had longing for a child till the couple had attained old age. The wife of Raja Kak was a great devotee of Mother Goddess Rajnya and she would often visit Her shrine at Tulamula along with her husband. It is said that one day the Mother was pleased with Her devotees and bestowed them with a boon and in this way Mrs. Pandit gave birth to two sons in due course of time. The first one was named Hari Ram and the second one was named Jivan. Hari Ram lived a family life after his marriage but Jivan turned his face away from the worldly affairs from the very childhood. His father married him at a very young age so as to make him come closer to the family, but he abandoned all the activities of the outer world and confined himself to a closed room and started deep penance while sitting on a raised wooden plank. A Hukah was his only companion during this period of seclusion otherwise he would very seldom eat or drink water/tea whenever his body felt such a need.

Disgusted parents wanted to keep the young Jivan busy with the day to day life, so his father employed him as a domestic servant in the house of a well to do Hindu family of Rainawari, Srinagar. The head of this family was a Revenue Office (Tehsildar) during those days of Pathan rule over Kashmir. Away from the constant sight and worry of his parents, Jivan Sahib got more time to practice meditation in his seclusion in the house of his employer. It is said that he lighted the kitchen hearth early in the morning as Holy Fire and offered dried cow dung as an offering to it while reciting, "Swaha". He made his abode in the kitchen room permanently and he would seldom come out of it. One night the mistress of the house woke up at midnight due to the smell of smoke coming out of the kitchen room. She got-up to find out the reason. As soon as she reached the kitchen door, she was astonished to see the cook sitting on the lighted hearth in Abhaya Mudra with a glittering halo around his body, dazzling bright like the full moon. The lady got perplexed and informed her husband who also witnessed the whole scene and told his wife that the man was spiritually positioned very high and they should stop him from preparing their meals, instead they should treat him with respect and reverence. Thus the hidden treasure came to light and people started thronging to this place.

Jivan Sahib was a compassionate saint who lived and witnessed the social and political pressures that his brethren had to face under the tyrant foreign rulers during a period of nearly one hundred years he lived. The house of his employer suited his saintly manners and the head of the house dared not interrupt him in his meditation that enabled his stay in the house for a longer period. In order to mitigate the pain and suffering of his devotees he readily performed a number of miracles during his stay at Rainawari, Srinagar. The Kabul Government had let loose a reign of terror and cruelty in the whole valley of Kashmir and their Governors looted the people of the valley in general and the Hindus in particular by levying extra taxes and using other means of repression. During this period many Afghan Governors were deputed by the Kabul regime to rule over Kashmir but all of them used the same means to harass the people of this land. The devotees reported the incidents of atrocities against innocent Hindus to the hermit whose heart often melted with compassion. A few such instances are recorded below.

i) During the reign of Azad Khan (1783 A.D.), a band of Pathan goons were passing through the erstwhile Nalah Mar, (an outlet of the Dal-Lake) near Misha Sahib in Srinagar. They saw a young Kashmiri Hindu girl on the bank of the said Mar and they dragged her to their Shikara and rowed towards Dal-lake. The act created resentment in the whole area and the parents of the girl, accompanied by some neighbours, came to the saint, for help. The saint was engrossed in deep meditation at the moment. On hearing the noise he broke his trance and taking his staff into his hand he started thrashing the walls of his room. While doing so he recited a couplet in Persian that meant,

"In the absence of an order from the Almighty,

Let the Shikara sink by the order of Jivan Sahib, killing all the miscreants and rescuing the lone Hindu girl"[1].

Instantly there was a storm in Dal-lake, the Shikara got over turned. All its occupants, except the young Hindu girl, were drowned in the deep waters of the lake. Thus the girl was rescued and handed over safely and honourably to her parents. The miracle worked and it was hot news even at the royal court.

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[1] *Agar hukm-e- Khuda neist,ba hukm-e- Jivan Saahib,* I
Kishti ghark-e-aab shud, Hindava az aab baalaa shud II
Sant Maala by Dilbar Kashmiri, Pt. I, II year, 1963, p.70.

ii.) Once the whole valley was reeling under disease and famine due to continuous drought-like conditions. There was death and devastation all around for want of rain, water, food grains and fodder for animals etc. Government watched as a spectator the distressful condition of the people at this difficult hour. Helpless people went to Jivan Sahib for help. The saint was moved by the pitiable condition of the common people. He lifted both his hands towards the sky and spoke out loudly a Persian couplet. Soon it started raining and the draught-like conditions and distress disappeared from the whole valley.

The news of the acts of miracles of the saint spread in the whole valley like wild fire. People started venerating him as their saviour and presented to him cooked food collectively and individually on the days of festivals and on occasions like marriages, etc., though all his devotees knew that he seldom took any meals. There lived at Rainawari in the neighbour-hood where Jivan Sahib stayed, a man of very little spiritual knowledge, Pandit Dila Ram Quli. Though he was a stray wanderer yet he would visit the hermitage of the saint often with great reverence and devotion.

iii).Once a marriage was solemnized in the neighbour-hood of Jivan Sahib and, as usual, a Thali of the feast was presented to the saint. The saint directed that the Thali containing the feast be carefully kept on the shelf duly covered. A few days later Dila Ram being hungry and thirsty happened to visit the hermit to get the blessings from the saint. As soon as Jivan Sahib saw him, he asked him affectionately. "Do you feel hungry?" The devotee kept quiet. The saint continued, "Get up and there is some stale food there" and pointing towards the shelf, he said, "Eat that." Dila Ram obeyed as directed. But when he started eating it, he could not swallow it easily. The food had lost its taste and flavour. The devotee took a few morsels, though un-willingly and with a great effort, for the satisfaction of the saint. The saint said again, "Why, isn't it worth eating? Mix some curd with the rice and try eating it again." The poor fellow obeyed and took a few morsels more and finally stopped eating. The saint exclaimed, "O! Unlucky fellow! Do you want to become the Governor this State or his brother-in-law?" Both the positions were out of reach for Pandit Dila Ram. He was neither adequately qualified person for the post nor had he any sister so that he could become the brother-in-law of the Governor after his sister's marriage. He was still pondering over the words of the saint who had already awakened and prompted Dila Ram. He ordered, "Stand up and proceed to Guta Kadal near Dalgate, along with your papers and inkstand and attend immediately the office of the Governor who has put his camp there." Dila Ram Quli obeyed and on reaching the spot he just started looking right and left to make his presence felt by the officials of the Governor, Haji Karimdad Khan. To his utter surprise he was requested by the orderly of the Governor to get inside the camp office. Thus he presented himself before the Governor and was asked by him to recite from a Diwan. With the blessings of the saint, he had attained the highest position of wisdom and learning and thus the Governor was much pleased with the wit and the presence of mind of Dila Ram. Haji Karimdad Khan (1779 A.D.) asked his Chief Minister, Fazal Khan to hand over his charge of office to Dila Ram Quli and he remained on this post even during the Governorship of Azad Khan (1783).

iv). Once Azad Khan, the Governor of Kashmir, was very much annoyed with Dila Ram and he asked him to get himself drowned in the waters of Dal Lake. While following the orders of the Governor, he attended the Ashram of his Guru to say him goodbye who, in turn, asked him to obey the government orders fearlessly. With the grace of his Guru he crossed a major portion of the lake bare footed without getting drowned in the water. This strengthened the belief in the mind of the Governor that Diwan had the blessings of Jivan Sahib. He, besides restoring him his Diwnaship, asked Dila Ram to introduce him to his Guru. Jivan Sahib agreed to fulfill the desire of his devotee reluctantly, saying that there was much disparity between the Ashram of a saint and the office of the ruler of a State. On the insistence of Dila Ram, Jivan Sahib asked him to convey his affirmation to his boss. On his visit to the Ashram of the hermit, Azad Khan witnessed a lion at the main gate of the Ashram. Frightened, he paid reverence to the saint from a distance and retreated to his palace. The undaunted hermit, however, sent him a word that there was hardly any place for a tyrant like him who tried to enter his premises. This massage was enough to change the mind of the Kabul Governor, Azad Khan, who ruled more carefully after this episode.

v). No sooner did Dila Ram depart from the saint after taking a few morsels of stale food than another devotee of the saint, Krishna Kotwal, a constable in the Police Department, entered the Ashram for paying his reverence to the Guru. The hermit asked him also to take the left over stale food. With the grace of God and good wishes of the Guru, he was elevated to the post of a very high Police Officer during this period of uncertainty and disorder in the valley. It is also said that one day a murderer gave a slip to Krishna Kotwal and this was a severe offence during those days. Besides the services, the life of the officer was at stake. He immediately came to the Ashram of Jivan Sahib, sobbing. After hearing his sad story, the hermit asked him to arrange a folk drama (Ba'nda' Je'shna') on a grand scale. The saint also said that the culprit would come to witness the folk drama, and in case he happened to recognize the offender, his (Kotwal's) problem would be solved. In this way the trap worked well and the culprit, who had come to witness the folk drama, was captured by Mr. Kotwal and thus his (Kotwal's) life was saved and his services restored.[1]

The exact date of birth of the saint is not available at all. P. N. K. Bamzai in his book, "History of Kashmir," (Revised Edition), 1973, places his birth in the second half of the eighteenth century, when Azad Khan, the Afghan Governor declared himself as the independent ruler of Kashmir (1783-85). It is presumed that by then he must have attained the prime of his age and the assumption that he lived through the eighteenth century (1700-1800) can not be ruled out. Jivan Sahib lived an austere life engrossed in meditation and penance at Rainawari, the eastern suburb of Srinagar city. Thousands of people flocked to his Ashram for solace and all listened attentively to his discourses, the essence of which was 'simple living and high thinking.' It was at the instance of the hermit that a hard hearted tyrant and arrogant Governor, Azad Khan became a changed man and accepted the path of devotion and love. In 1785 Timur invaded Kashmir with a strong Afghan army and thus ended the period of tyranny let lose by Azad Khan and his predecessors.

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[1] A mention of these miracles is contained in Sant Mala, by Dilbar, Kashmiri, Pts I, and II, year 1963, pp. 69-74.

The Governors from Kabul or their representatives who ruled over Kashmir after Azad Khan were not less tyrant. The fearless saint had kept himself associated with the people of the valley socially and politically in spite of the fact that such actions involved political repercussions. He got very little time for his self elevation and penance. To attain the desired heights in spirituality, Jivan Sahib, left the city dwelling and after a long wandering and undergoing a deep penance at Gosa'ni' Go'nd, Anantnag, he returned to the village, Laduva in Vihi Paragana in the lap of the small valley at the foot of the famous hill, Vasturvana and made his lodgings in a stone crevice of the hill near the most fascinating spring of fresh water known as Dader Nag. It is said that he engrossed himself in deep penance for a considerable period facing towards the holy shrine of Mother Goddess Jwala Ji, whose abode is on the Jwala Parvat at Khrew just opposite Laduva hermitage of the saint and here he decided to live a secluded life without mixing with the local people.

It is said that devotion unto Him is a source of spiritual flood-light and it does not remain concealed. People thronged to the hermitage of Jivan Sahib here as well. The news reached the Governors of the Kabul regime. They tried to persuade the hermit to return to the city but to no avail. Finally, the later Afghan rulers ordered a land grant for the up keep of the shrine and to meet the day to day requirements of the Ashram run there by the hermit. The fame of the Dhooni Hermit had reached all the corners of the valley. The whole area had once again resumed its lost glory and fame. The Jivan Langar was open to every devotee who visited the place. Religious discourses and discussions were held there. The land granted by the Royal edict was managed by the disciples, called Rishis. Every body was welcome to accept the Rishi cult by observing strictly two restrictions. One was to remain a vegetarian throughout life and the other was to abstain from family life. Such dedicated devotees called Rishis had to maintain complete austerity and celibacy (Brahamcharya) and they also had to lead a simple life.

The stronghold of the Sikh rule in the Punjab had started extending the social contacts between some parts of northern India and the valley. It increased due to influx of a number of saints and scholars from the Indian plains. The locals of the village Laduva report that one such saint arrived along with a group of his 100 disciples to the hermitage of Jivan Sahib for holding a religious discourse. Jivan Sahib was digging in the kitchen garden when the saint along with his hoard of disciples arrived. The Saint saw that the hermit killed countless insects and worms while digging the land with his hoe and he was in a fix to see this and thought that no religious discourse was possible with a person who cared least for all these living creatures that came under his hoe while digging. On the arrival of the saint and his disciples the hermit left digging and attended to the saint. He led them to the fresh water spring and asked them to wash and bathe. He offered them fresh water to drink and welcomed them to his small cottage. It was a double storeyed hutment of the old Kashmir type building having a store and a kitchen on the ground floor and an open space on the first floor as a sitting place for the general public. The hermit led them to the first floor of his dwelling and made arrangements for their proper seating. With his best efforts he was able to accommodate the saint and his 99 disciples only and one of the guests could not be accommodated for want of space. The hermit had no alternative but to offer his own seat to the guest. He took his grass mat out through the adjacent window and placed it in the space outside (in air) and seated himself on it. The saint was astonished to see all this. Next the hermit wished that the guests be served Qahwa till the food was ready. His disciples brought the bronze cups "Kha'sya" and a brass tumbler "Tumba" containing Qahwa .and they filled the cups of all the hundred guests from the contents of a single tumbler. The saint felt all the more amazed. After a short while the devotees from the kitchen informed that the food was ready. The courtyard of the house was besmeared with brown clay and grass mats were arranged for the guests. The three pots containing the cooked vegetables, pulses and rice were brought and kept on the besmeared place. The guest-saint felt that the pots contained the food items that could be sufficient for 10 to 15 persons only but his wonder crossed all limits when he saw that all the 100 earthen plates "Tabchi" were filled with sufficient quantity of food and vegetable, etc., and still sufficient food was left for the host and his people. The food was thus served to the guests one "Tabchi" each and the one that was presented to the saint heading the guests, appeared to him to be filled with worms and insects. Thus he abstained from eating. After the meals, once again all assembled at the first floor sitting place. The hermit went to his seat outside the room in the air and requested the guest-saint to express the purpose of his visit to his hermitage. The saint came, begged his pardon and said that he had already got an answer to his questions. The hermit told him that the work that he was doing in his kitchen garden was one allotted to him by the Almighty and. it was His duty to see the wrong and right in it and it was his duty to do it as his Karma.

The miracles of this famous hermit do not end here. He is said to have taken one of his disciples for the Holy dip of the Ganga at Haridwar through the waters of the Dader Nag situated close to the shrine of Jivan Sahib. It is said that one of his disciples insisted on going to Haridwar on a particular auspicious date and Jivan Sahib took a plank of wood in his hand and threw it into the water of the said Nag early in the morning on that particular date. He sat on it wearing his wooden slippers and asked the disciple to extend his hand while keeping his eyes closed. Lo! The next moment they were at Haridwar and back at Dader Nag after the holy bath in the Ganga.

It is said that he had meditated in the deep forests of the famous and ancient shrine at Go'sa'ini Go'nd, Anantnag District for a long time. At the time of his departure from that place he planted a half burnt and left over branch of a Pine tree of his Dhooni, that sprouted and is now a very big Pine tree of that area and is known as the Jivan Sa'b'en Ya'r. A pinch of ashes from his Dhooni worked miracles for the remedy of innumerable ailments of his devotees. Maharaja Ranvir Singh (1856-85) constructed a big temple at Gosa'ni Go'nd and offered a land endowment in the name of the Go'sa'ini Go'nd Asthapan, which in itself speaks of the glory of this famous shrine and the saint.

The fame of Jivan Sahib spread far and wide during his life time. He was revered by all, Muslims and Hindus alike. The exact date of the Nirvaan of this luminary of Kashmir is shrouded in mystery like his date of birth, but it is said that he was a contemporary of H. H. Mirza Kak, Shakkar Sahib, Kashi Kak, Bhagwan Gopi Nath Ji and Wahab Khar are said to be the earlier and regular visitors to his holy shrine The Samadhi of this great luminary, who remained a Shakti Upasak all his life, is situated in this area covered with the lofty Chinars and walnut trees planted by the saint himself and his devotees. Every plant is decorated with a raised platform around it. His disciples attached to his Samadhi, are known as "Sheshyas/Rishis" who, besides remaining Brahamcharis all their lives, also preserved and kept burning the holy fire of his "Dhoni" till the year 1990, when they were ousted from the valley. The personal belongings of the holy saint at his Samadhi comprise:

1. The mystic stick, (Yoga Danda),
2. The long woolen cap (Kantop),
3. The wooden slippers (Khrav),
4. A whisker (Chamar), and
5. A set of idols (Thokursa'b) that he worshipped .[1]

This Pandit family of Kashmir is survived by the progeny of the brother of the saint, late Shri Hari Ram Pandit .having "Peer" as their surname. Sh Shiv Ji Peer and his son, Sh. Sham Lal ji, celebrate the Jayanti of Swami Ji on the second day of the bright half of the month of Margashirsha and his Nirvan is held on the second day of the dark half of the month of Phalguna. On both these occasions a Havan is performed and besides the disciples, the locals also participate in the Havan held on the Jayanti and Nirvan days to receive blessings of the saint at such devotional gatherings. Mr. Sham Lal Peer is said to have printed a short sketch of the luminary who lived for the whole eighteenth century and who had been honoured as Peer-i-Kamil by the then Afghan Governor of Kashmir, Azad Khan. Unfortunately, in spite of the best efforts from all quarters, the author could not get a copy of this short sketch printed by Mr. Peer.

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[1] An account of some of the miracles of the saint and the information regarding the remnants of the saint at his Laduva Ashram, have been recorded from a conversation held with Late M.L.Koul, 'Khodabali' who was deeply associated with the Shrine of the hermit at his Laduva hermitage.

Author.

Pandit. Kashyap Bhandu
A 20th Century Social Reformer of
Kashmiri Pandits

3. Pandit. Kashyap Bandhu

A 20th Century Social Reformer

The very name, Kashyap Bandhu, conjures up in our minds the image of an undaunted political leader and social reformer who was well disposed and who lived among Kashmiri Pandits, a microscopic minority of the valley. Not many of us are aware of the achievements of this great son of the land who had the encyclopedic knowledge of almost all the villages of the valley of Kashmir, especially those inhabited by negligible number of Hindu minority, living in the remote areas of the valley. He had extensively toured and travelled some of the cities of the erstwhile and un-divided sub-continent in general and the whole of the valley in particular along with his devoted followers. No doubt, in his youth, he travelled the whole of the Indian sub-continent, but he spent major portion of his life including his youth in the upliftment of the down trodden and the negligible Hindu minority of the valley. He knew the name of each and every village by heart along with the names of some of its most influential persons living there. He had a sound knowledge of the condition of Hindu population that lived in the far flung areas of the valley with their names and the extent of their land holdings, etc. He was the only officer of the State Government who, in the accompaniment of late Mr. G. M. Shah, the then State Minister, personally looked after the process of rehabilitation of the Hindu and Sikh masses after their flight from their villages during the Pakistani Tribal raid in October, 1947. The exodus of the minority community from the valley would have been complete then but for the timely intervention of the then State Government and the undaunted services of Pt. Kashyap Bhandhu, normalcy was restored in the strife torn State during those days of total political uncertainty.

Born on ninth day of the dark fortnight of Chaitra in the year 1898 A.D. at Gairoo (now called Noorpora), in the house of a well-to-do Kashmiri Pandit family of Sh.Thakur Bhat, the child got the name of Tara Chand Bhat from his parents. His mother Kuda Ma'li was a devout Kashmiri Pandit lady belonging to a respectable and literate Koul family living in the neighbourhood of the Bhat's family. Her father Hara Koul was a person of name and fame in the whole area for his pious deeds. He had planted a number of Chinar trees at a number of places in the vicinity of his village including the roads, Govt. land and other similar areas in the neighbour-hood of his village, not for grabbing such land but for the good of the humanity. People remember these Chinar trees as "Hara Koulen Booni" "the Chinars of Hara Koul" even to day. In those days marriages in the villages were generally solemnized on the basis of "Andyut", 'exchange marriage' - a boy and a girl of one family given in marriage to the boy and a girl of another family. In view of the fact that both the families were of equal economic status, the marriage of Thakur Bhat was solemnized in his neighbourhood with the sister of Hara Koul on the "Andpye'th", marriage basis. This was a modern type of marriage in which a boy of a family is directly married to the girl of another family without seeking any exchange. This type of marriage was common with the people living in Srinagar city only but very rare in the remote villages due to lack of proper education and development.

Thakur Bhat had three brothers and five sisters. Two among the four brothers, named Sahaza Bhat and Madhava Bhat remained unmarried lifelong. While the former looked after the household matters and helped his brother in the maintenance of the land including fields and orchards. The later was given in adoption to some Safaya family in Srinagar. The fourth brother Sata Lal Bhat was an. employee in the A.G's office. One of the sisters of Thakur Bhat had been married in some Koul family at Srinagar. She was childless so her brother, Thakur Bhat, gave his first son, namely "Tarukh", in adoption to her. Unfortunately his father (Mr.Koul) was short lived and he died after a few years after this adoption. The mother and the infant were left at the mercy of her in-laws who didn't treat them well. Hence, Tarukh went back to his original parental house at Gairoo along with his mother.

Like all other village boys, Tara Chand Bhat "Tarukh" as he was nick named, completed his Primary education locally and also attended the Pathshalla classes like all other children of the village under the guidance of Shridhar Pandit. He often took Persian lessons from a Maqtab teacher Bala Kak Bhat, who lived in his neighbour-hood. On the completion of Primary education, the father took him to Srinagar, the only place where he could manage for him Middle and High school education. Here he was admitted in the then Hindu High School established by the famous Christian Missionary, Anne Basent, which latter got the name of Sri Pratap High School when the same was taken over by the then State Government. He made the arrangement of his stay in the house of his uncle at Safaya House, his uncle's family.

From here started the bad days for the boy because the uncle (Safaya) and his family considered him to be a burden. Tarukh was treated as a servant of the whole Mohalla who was obliged to do all menial jobs in the Safaya house and the neighbours. His father would often visit the house of the relatives of his late brother and offer the family huge gifts to look after the education of the boy. The height of things was that the poor boy was deprived of his bedding brought by his father, so he purchased a set of fresh woolen blankets for him. The boy purchased a cloth sheet out of his pocket money because his tender skin was not used to bear the rough texture of the woolen blankets. When his guardian came to know about this fact, he pulled the sheet of cloth from under the blanket of the boy when he was asleep, saying "A bear like beast having human skin"? [1] Thus annoyed with the behaviour of his uncle, the boy left this house to stay with the family of Maheshwar Nath Bhat, who a renowned school teacher from Mohalla Agahamam, Srinagar, and a friend of his father. Maheshwar Nath Bhat had a long experience as a Primary School teacher in a number of villages including Gairoo, where he had also got married. The Bhat family owned the boy as one of their own children and the boy felt it like his choicest home and attended his school without any problem though very late.

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[1] "Haapath kaayayi Aada'mi tsa'm", 'the bear with the human skin', were the words which his uncle shouted at Tara Chand while removing forcibly the cloth sheet laid under his woolen blankets. This episode was conveyed to the author by Pandit Kashyap Bandhu personally at a meeting held at Gairoo.(Noorpora) in early eighties Author.

Thus, living under these unfavourable circumstances for a pretty long time, the educational career of Tara Chand remained disrupted and he could hardly continue his studies properly beyond his ninth class but when he took his tenth class examination, he failed. The shame of failure and the dread of his father prompted him to leave his Srinagar home and he went secretly to Lahore. He joined the Arya Smaj movement and associated himself with a number of similar social organizations. Having a sound knowledge of Urdu, Persian, English and Sanskrit, he got associated with the editorial staff of some of the local dailies at Lahore. He often attended literary gatherings and started writing poetry in Urdu under the pseudonym of 'Bulbul'. In a short span of time he got name and fame in the neighbouring state of the Punjab. During this time he came into contact with a famous scholar of Sanskrit and Indology, namely, Acharya Vishva Bandhu of Vishveshvarananda Vedic Research Institute, Hoshiarpur, Punjab. In the very first meeting the Acharya asked the handsome and laborious boy, who had shown aptitude for higher learning, his name. The boy gave him his name as Tara Chand 'Bubul'. The Acharya said, "People call me Vishva Bandhu (brother of the people) the world over and I name you from today onwards as Kashyap Bandhu (the well-wisher of the progeny of Kashyapa living in the valley of Kashmir)". Thus Tara Chand Bhat/ Bulbul assumed the name of Kashyap Bandhu from that date onwards. It is during this period that he married a Punjabi girl while he was an active Arya Smaj worker. Though he had a son from this marriage, but his married life did not prove a success. [1]

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[1] This information was conveyed to the author by Pandit Kashyap Bandhu himself in a meeting held at Gairoio in early eighties.

Kashyap Bandhu had left the valley during the reign of Maharaja Pratap Singh when the star of Dogra rule was shining bright. He returned to the valley after traveling throughout the whole of the erstwhile Punjab State, including some areas of Himachal and Delhi, during the concluding years of the third decade of the twentieth century when the seeds of revolt against the autocracy had started sprouting in the valley. Social, economic and political awakening had come to the mind of the common man in the sub-continent as a whole. The State of Jammu and Kashmir including the valley was still reeling under the autocratic rule of landlords and affluent people. The common Kashmiri Pandits were no exception. Under these prevailing conditions of the society Pt. Kashyap Bandhu returned to the valley during the middle of the thirties. He started a social reform movement among the members of his own Pandit community that had started grumbling because of limited economic sources, evil social customs and rituals. He organized the scattered community of the Pandits under one banner that he named as Sudhar Samati. He inspired the women folk of his community to own the new dress code of Dhoti and Shilwar-Qameez, He advocated the re-marriage of widows and propagated women‘s education. The community was also educated about social evils like dowry and female infanticide. Each family had the social obligation to set aside one handful of rice for the Samati known as "Mochhi Pho'l" and the money got from the sale of this rice was spent for the betterment of the weak and down trodden members of the community. Through the strenuous efforts of the Samati, a sea change was observed in the Kashmiri Pandit society. The mouthpiece of this organization was the Daily Kashmir Kesiri published under the able editorship of Pandit Kashyap Bandhu. Its editorials worked well with the society and these achieved an influential status in the political field. Taking a serious note of the revolutionary articles and editorials of the paper, the Maharaja banned the publication of the paper. It was with great deliberations with the executive members and the leaders of the Samati that The Daily Desh was declared as the future mouthpiece of the organization. There was one more socio-political party among the Kashmiri Pandits known as the Yuvak Sabha working under the leadership of Sh. S. N. Fotedar and other veteran politicians like S/S J.L. Kilam, D. P. Dhar, M.L. Misri, N.N. Raina (Saraf), P.N. Jalali, O.N. Trisal and other who worked as active members of its executive body. A majority of the Muslim population of the State had joined the Muslim Conference under the leadership of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and others like Kh. Afzal Beg, G.M. Sadiq, G.M. Shah, Bakshi Ghulam Mohd., Saddar-ud-Dine Mujahid were its active and executive members.

The communal discord of 1931 followed by a similar attempt in 1934 had shaken the very roots of Hindu-Muslim unity in the valley for the members of the majority community notionally felt that some of the members of the minority community were in league with the State and the Maharaja. Though the miscreants got a chance to plunder Hindu houses and loot business establishments in some interior areas and secluded outskirts of the Srinagar city, but this gave rise to the interactions between some of the leaders of both the communities of the State for future deliberations. The Muslim Conference had come into existence very recently (in 1932) and it was not until July 28, 1938, that Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, its President could mobilize opinion for a meeting to assess the on going situation. Finally on July 28, 1938, the executive members of the Muslim Conference met and after protracted discussion continuously for more than 52 hours, it was resolved that the membership of the party tickets be kept open for all the communities of the State without caste, religion and creed. A few fundamentalists apposed this decision but they could not stand before the heavy hand of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, who with the approval of his followers renamed the party as National Conference. Consequent upon this J.L. Kilam a prominent Kashmiri Pandit and an active member left the Yuvak Sabha to join the newly constituted National Conference together with Kashyap Bandhu and they were the first among the Hindu leadership to join the party. Later all others followed suit.

The Khidmat, was till then a weekly Urdu paper of the State with Ghulam Rasool Aarif as its Editor. It was declared the official organ of the newly constituted National Conference in November, 1941. This was the first Urdu daily of the State and Maulana Mohd Sayed Masoodi, Ghulam Ahmad Kashfi were associated with the paper under the editorship of Pandit Nand Lal Koul Talib.. The "Desh" was closed due to the absence of Pandit Kashyap Bandhu, who started "The Daily Martand" as the mouthpiece of the Hindu minority in the new set-up. Both the Dailies worked wonders for both the communities as a whole for a few decades.

The news about the Indian struggle for independence from the foreign rule travelled more quickly than before and the contacts between the leaders of the State and rest of the country increased. Besides the members of the Indian National Congress, some fundamentalist parties also tried to interfere in Kashmir politics but they were straight away rejected by the leadership of both the communities of the State. It took little time for the National Conference to deepen its roots in the rural areas including small towns of the valley because the way for such awakening had earlier been paved by the Muslim Conference. Some of the socio-political groups of the sub-continent had started taking advantage of the situation that had developed in the valley due to the past riots. Accordingly some such groups of the sub-continent that had some links with the Arya Smaj, and the R.S. S. wanted to exploit the on going events and they tried their influence on the minority groups of the valley. Likewise the people who apposed the new developments and had deserted the Indian Congress at the centre and the National Conference at the state level, wanted to fan the sentiments of the majority community. There was a common resentment in the peace loving minds of both the communities of the valley who alleged that the riots were uncalled for, as these were started and manipulated by some vested interests. In order to ease the tension, a joint meeting of both the communities that had recently joined the National Conference, was arranged by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. Mr. Abdullah had by then attained respect as a leader of national fame among the prominent members of the Indian Congress for his secular outlook and his practical politics by changing the nomenclature of Muslim Conference to National

Conference. The support of some top members of the Hindu organizations of the State like J.L. Kilam, Kashyap Bandhu, D. P. Dhar,, M.L. Misri, N.N. Raina (Saraf), P.N.Jalali, O.N. Trisal and others having joined the newly emerged National Conference, added to his stature. A number of leaders of the sub-continent visited the valley to pursue and re-organize some of the Kashmiri Pandit leaders but they, in return, received a simple but firm answer, "The numbers required in a democratic setup, are not in our favour." Kashmiri Pandit leaders and the minority community thus accepted the offer to join the National Conference, a choice which the majority community had extended to them in early fifties.

With the end of the Dogra rule in 1947, a people's Government under the leadership of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, came into existence and Kashyap Bandhu was given an independent charge of Dehat Sudhar and Rehabilitation in the newly formed government in the state of Jammu and Kashmir so as to safe-guard the interests of the people who had been up-rooted by the tribal invaders from Pakistan. It was a laudable work done by Bandhu Ji in rehabilitating the destitute refugees, some of whom had changed even their religion en-block, and he brought them back into the Hindu fold. It was really an up-hill task to visit the most of the remote areas. Kh. Ghulam Mohammad Shah, the then State Minister, accompanied him in this noble task .to set right the matters and a viewed discretion of the ordeals faced by them in accomplishing this venture, is in it self a subject that needs a separate narration.

The release of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and some other leaders from confinement in connection with the Kashmir Conspiracy Case included Kashyap Bandhu as well. In order to enable him to qualify for the State Pensioner's benefits, he was advised by the then Prime Minister of the State to serve as Chief Project Officer of Sonawari Block of the then Ganderbal Tehsil for a few years as required under the standing Pension Rules. It was due to his strenuous efforts that the low lying and water logged area of Sumbal attained the name of Sonawari, 'the orchard yielding gold'. .The Editor of The (Daily)

Northlines, Jammu, has rightly said in its thought provoking editorial note dated 20th April; 2008, that, "A swamp area of the valley becomes Sonawari (an area yielding gold) in the real sense" Such miracles do happed when there is a dedicated worker like Pandit Kashyap Bandhu, backed by a sincere Prime Minister like Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq, to pursue the people for the accomplishment of the affairs. Pandit Kashyap Bandhu was also a close associate of national leaders like Mridula Sarabai and Vijay Lakshmi Pandit, the fore-runners of Idian National Congress.

Bandhu Ji, the foresighted leader of the Kashmiri Pandits, had foreseen plight of the community at the hands of the fundamentalists of the majority community and had expressed it as the sad tale of the four remaining Kashmiri Pandits of the valley, who, while bearing the atrocities of the fundamentalists, would stay back in the valley to get perished one by one. He lamented, "One of them shall die and the other three will cremate him and so on till the last one shall have no one to carry his bier. The body would thereupon be buried by the neighbouring Muslims making the end of the Kashmiri Pandit community. Only the ghost of the buried would roam and scream in the night".[1] This was, of course, on the one hand an apocryphal act, but at the same time, a comment on the mind set of the majority Muslim community and their callous and hostile attitude towards the Hindu minority community and on the other hand it was a warning for the minority community to remain more alive and vigilant to the situations that would arise under such circumstances. These conditions still prevail in the valley unabated though the preachers of peace and progress have been advocating for normalcy for decades now but the results are still illusive.

The doyen of our microscopic community, who initiated a renaissance in the whole Kashmiri Pandit community of the valley in early thirties of the twentieth century, breathed his last at his native village Gairoo (Noor Pora), Tral, Kashmir on 18th December, 1985.

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[1] Koshur Samachar, New Delhi dated; Feb., 2000 page 16,

In the present times, the prophesy made by Bahdhu Ji less than a century earlier in one of his thought provoking editorials has come true about the social disintegration and degradation of the values of common man. The tragedy of exodus of the Kashmiri Pandits from their homes and hearths in 1990 and onwards is a slow march in that direction, which though enormously painful, shall surely prove fatal for the whole community. To mitigate the pain of a disaster of such a magnitude requires an over all supervision of dedicated social reformers and leaders like late Kashyap Bandhu. It is an admitted fact that Bandhu Ji always worked as a missionary, whether it was in the case of a small area like the Sonawari belt, or the humanitarian approach that he exhibited during the unexpected calamity that was thrust upon the Indian domain by our neighbour, when some parts of the State of Jammu and Kashmir were plundered by the "Raiders" from Pakistan, particularly up-rooting the Hindu and the Sikh population of the State in 1947.

Sir Aural Stein - The perfect Missionary

4. Kashmiri Pandit Scholars And Sir Aural Stein

There is no denying the fact that the Sharada Desha was a treasure-house of knowledge and learning for those who entered the valley in quest of higher learning and it also proved as golden goose for those who believed in plunder and loot. No doubt, the golden periods of history have made the economic condition of some of the inhabitants of the valley better and more prosperous than others but the dark periods that cover the major portion and longer spans of the valley's history, have been very painful and distressing for all including the so called affluent citizens of our society. There are numerous references of this to be found in books written by some foreign scholars also who visited our land for very short periods either as travellers, or missionaries, or as religious preceptors or seekers. It is a recorded fact that several alien invaders and religious preachers have made numerous attempts to thrust their faith and religious thoughts and beliefs on us and they have even succeeded in their motive of initiating a change in the demography of large stretches of land in the valley.

The apathy of the foreign rule for complete one millennium over the sub-continent had shattered the already dilapidating social order of our fractured society that had attained more rigidity just to save its basic form from further wreckage. It was not until the end of the seventeenth century that the common man in India could differentiate between the thinking patterns of the erstwhile alien rulers and the new missionaries who advanced their political ambitions in the garb of trade and commerce. The other part of the story is that during the past two/three centuries up to the first half of the 20th century a number of European Scholars, like Dr. Bernier (1664 A.D.) Moorcroft, W., (1823 A.D.), Dr. H. H. Wilson (1825 A. D.), Mr. A. Troyer (1840 A.D.), Prof. Lassen (1866-74), Prof. Buhler (1875 A.D.), Aural .Stein (1888 A.D.), W.R. Lawrence, (1895), Sir George A. Grierson, (1906 A.D.), A. Cunningham (1924), M. Winternitz, (1923 A.D.), P.V. Kane (1930 A.D.) and others visited the valley especially in search of scholarship only and they knowledge this fact without any other motive.

Prof.Buhler, a great Sanskrit scholar and an Ideologist who visited the valley in 1875 made strenuous efforts to locate the original manuscript of the Chronicle compiled by Kalhana. It was his zeal and zest to procure the original manuscript of the Chronicle with a running commentary by the famous Sanskrit scholar Rajanaka, He was able to locate the manuscript at Srinagar in the house of a Pandit Brahmin. Prof. Buhler succeeded in having just a glimpse of the manuscript that prompted the scholar to find ways and means so that the labour and the time it involved and the resources that would be needed to accomplish such a stupendous task, could be planned out. In view of the fact that, neither the resources nor the time required to accomplish the huge job, were at his disposal, so he left the matter without pursuing it. The paucity of time at the disposal of the scholar affected further efforts. But before his return to Europe in the year 1881 he had translated and annotated verses 1-107 of Book- I of the Chronicle of Pandit Kalhana on the codes furnished by the famous Sanskrit Scholar of the seventeenth century, Pandit Rajanaka Rattana Kantha. The methodology of translation, the modes of editing and annotation as initiated by Prof. Buhler, clearly show that the scholar had made up his mind to work on the project but his early return to Europe in 1881 seems to have shattered all his hopes. Sir Aural Stein has been quite candid in confessing that 'the specimen of the project and the articles published in Indian Antiquary Vols., xviii and xix on the projects by Dr. Hultzsch and others, intended to supply an abstract translation of the Chronicle and also furnish a considerable number of useful critical observations with regard to Kalhana's system of chronology.'[1]

With the patronage of the Maharaja of Kashmir and due to the intervention of the Lahore Residency, Stein, on his second visit to the valley, in 1889, was able to lay his hand on the original manuscript of the Chronicle along with its codes by Pandit Rajanaka. To his astonishment, the folios of the Chronicle had

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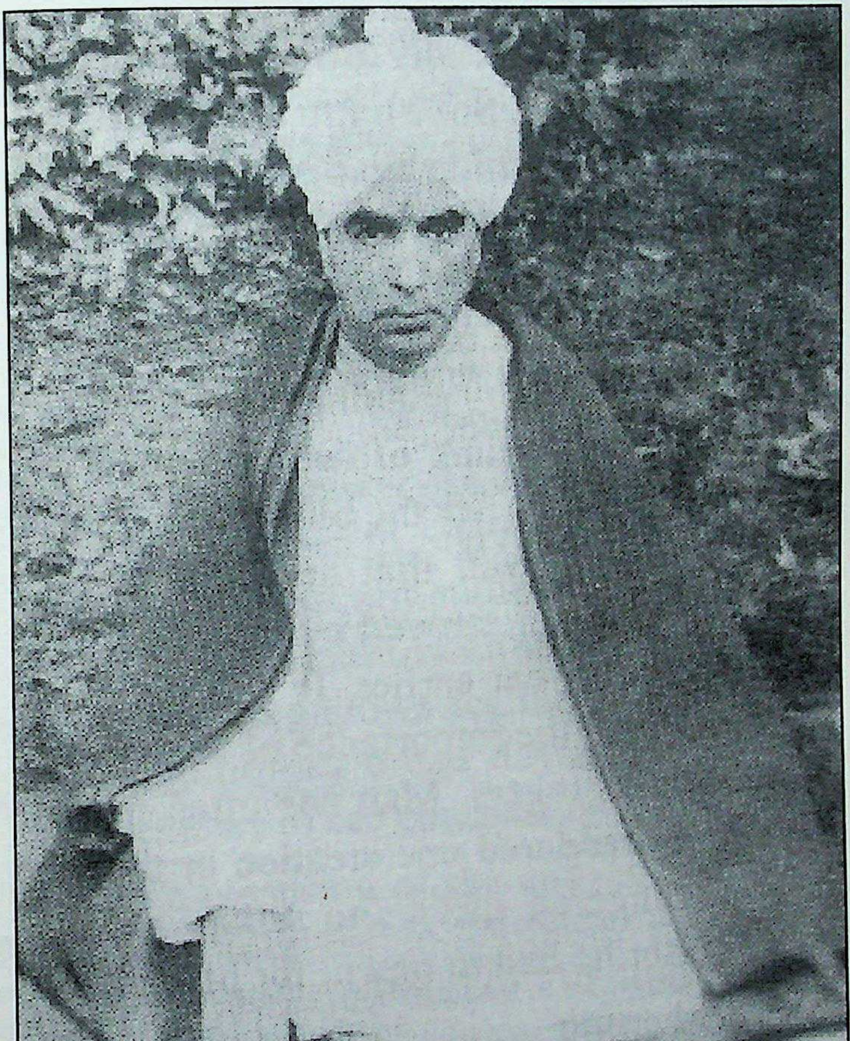
[1] Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*, by R.L. Stein, Vol. I, p. xii-xiii.



Pandit Govind Kaul Shastri
(1850 to 1899 A.D.)

been shared by the three heirs of the original owner along with its codes. However, the said sharing had damaged a few folios of the work, yet the damages were at an initial stage and had very little adverse effect on the main manuscript according to the translator.

Thus the work on the project was started simultaneously as for its text, translation and annotation was concerned so as to place it before the readers and the lovers of history world over in its voluminous form as early as possible. This gave rise to the presence of voluminous treasures of knowledge in many other branches of learning that were available through the length and breadth of the valley. Here the European scholar had to harness the services of some of the great Sharada Scholars of Kashmir who could read and transliterate such materials including the Chronicle with its codes as explained by Rajanaka in the Sharada script and render all the material into Devanagri script. Besides, employing a horde of other staff required in such voluminous compilation and translation projects, the services of great scholars of Sharada/Sanskrit, like, Govind Koul, Makund Ram Shastri, and Prof Nityanand Shastri, were harnessed in this venture.

Pandit Govind Kaul (1850 to 1899 A.D.)

Pandit Govind Kaul was first identified to assist in rendering the transliteration of the Chronicle into Devanagri by Prof Buhler. Mr Kaul was also acquainted with the local lore and traditions of the valley, which the author readily incorporated, where ever necessary, while evaluating the text of the Chronicle. He also served as a scribe in preparing the translation and the commentary of the project. He prepared the Sanskrit indices of the *Rajatarangini,* its later copied editions and other Sanskrit texts that required a reference in the chronicle. The stories and other explanations connected with the *Ramayana,* the *Mahabharata* and the *Nilamata Purana* that Kalhana had quoted in the chronicle and which were apt to create confusion in the mind of an alien translator, were worked out and suitably arranged under the guidance of Mr Kaul. In this way he did a monumental work in lessening the burden of the translator during the short span of his life. He was the person who helped his master in the preliminary collection of the Lahore manuscript of the Chronicle that proved a boon to the translator to prepare a critical edition of the text. Pandit Govind Kaul, with the research experience of Prof. Nityanand Shastri, assisted Sir Aural Stein in editing Hatim's Tales that his house-hold servant Kashi Rama had narrated to the learned scholar. Stein has recorded in the foreword of the said book, "Had the able assistance of Pandit Govind Kaul not been assured to me from the very beginning, I would have never considered undertaking the task." Aural Stein later passed all these stories and its records to Sir George Grierson for its detailed study when the later had taken in hand the compilation of the Linguistic Survey of India in the year 1910. For all these studies and the timely help of Aural Stein in various literary matters, Sir George Grierson was very much impressed with the treasure of literature that the Kashmiri language possessed. This prompted him to work for the compilation of a Dictionary of Kashmiri language in the year 1899 and in this venture of compiling the first English-Kashmiri Dictionary; he was again assisted by Mr. Stein who recommended Mr. Kaul to help him in compiling this work. Pt Govind Kaul readily accepted the offer and worked on the project for a very short time. A dynamic scholar that he was, he left his deep impressions on the compilation of the project with the result that Sir Aural Stein himself put on record that "Pandit Govind Kaul died at Srinagar in the summer of 1899, separated from me at the time by the whole breadth of India. But I hope that this public acknowledgement of his services will help to preserve the memory of a scholar who was worthy to maintain the learned tradition of the land of S'arada."[1]

It may be pointed out that the western scholars were very sincere in acknowledging the labour and scholarship that was put in by the Kashmiri scholars in the accomplishment of a number of literary projects from time to time. Sir Aural Stein was recommended for Knighthood and the same was conferred on him by the British Government on October 12, 1912. Speaking on this august occasion Stein confessed before the Royal gathering, “The first sure and certain steps on this road of name and fame were taken with the help of Pt. Govind Kaul.” This was a befitting reward from a great scholar like Mr. Stein for one of his Kashmiri helps.

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[1] **Preface to *Kalhana's Rajatarangini,* by R.L. Stein, Vol., I, p. xxii-xxiii.**

George Buhlar first visited Kashmir in 1875 in search of Sanskrit manuscripts and he put on record that Sanskrit language was most popular among the Brahmins of the valley. Besides the common literate gentry, he speaks very high of some of the Pandits of the valley that included, Pt. Daya Ram who was the treasure-house of information, Jotshi Pandit Damodar, the Chief Pandit of the Maharaja, who was a scholar of Sanskrit language. He also had the opportunity to meet Pt. Goveind Kaul, and Damodar Jotshi who were the unparalleled scholars of Sanskrit language in the whole valley.[1]

Pandit Mukund Ram Shastri (1853 –1921 A.D.)

The valley of Kashmir was a storehouse of ancient Sanskrit literature written either on birch-bark or on the old locally made paper. Though Sanskrit had lost its old grandeur and currency yet it was still a common language with the Brahmins of the valley as is recorded by George Buhler on his first visit report to the valley in search of Sanskrit manuscripts in the year 1875 A.D., in the last decade of Maharaja Ranbir Singh’s rule. He records that the king was himself a lover of learning and his court was decorated with scholars like Pandit Damodhar and Pandit Dayaram, great scholars of Sanskrit. The State Government had established a Research Department for editing, annotating, collating and publishing the manuscripts procured by the Department for the purpose. The main Pandits who worked there included, besides a galaxy of scholars, Pandit Mukund Ram Shastri (1853 - 1921 A.D.) who later worked with Sir George Grierson for completion of the first Kashmiri Dictionary after the death of Pandit Govind Koul in 1899. Pandit Mukund Ram Shastri worked on the project for full 22 years. Sir George Grierson has put on record the following words for the labour put in by Pandit Mukund Ram, Shastri in the compilation of this project. He records, " Pandit Makund Ram Shastri labored with me on this task for more than 20 years and often came to hot plains of Bihar, far away from his home in snow and mountains and did not live to see the complete sheets of the work on which he spent fruitful years of his scholarship."

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[1] P.N.K.Bamzai, A History of Kashmir, 1963, p. 833.

In 1914 A.D., Sir George Grierson, while collecting information about the Kashmiri language for inclusion in the Linguistic Survey of India, was very much impressed by the Vakhs of Lalleshwari that were very popular among the masses of the valley. His astonishment was four fold when he learnt that there was no written tradition of these Vakhs available with anybody anywhere in the valley but still the Vakhs travelled from one generation to another by the word of mouth. He impressed upon Pandit Mukund Ram Shastri to work on the project and he assigned to him the job of collecting the Vakhs of Lalla, the 14th century saint poetess of Kashmir. The strenuous efforts of Pandit Mukund Ram Shastri located a saint named Pandit Dharam Das at village Gushi, a remote corner of Kamraz division of the valley and he recorded all the Lalla- vakhs that the saint remembered by heart and he (Shastri Ji) handed them over to George Grierson with his illustrations and explanations.

Sir Richard Temple came to the valley in late 1884 in search of Folk Songs of Northern India and he came across Lalla Vakhs compiled and annotated by Maha Mahopadhyaya Pandit Mukund Ram Shastri. He was greatly impressed by the scholarship of the Pandit. He traced the genealogy of Pandit Mukund Ram Shastri and described him in these words, "Pandit Mukund Ram Shastri was a living pupil in the line of the descendents of the founder of Kashmir Shaivism, Aacharya Abhinavagupta".

The sincerity and devotion of the Pandit scholars of Kashmir towards their allotted and entrusted literary works was an established fact with different Indologists of the world and they always sought the help from the Kashmiri Pandits in the accomplishment of their literary tasks especially connected with the Kashmiri lore and literature.

Mahamahopadhyaya Pandit Mukund Ram Shastri

(1853, 1921 A.D.)

An English scholar namely Pope Ved Paul was allotted a project connected with the Tibetan Studies. He also approached Pandit Mukund Ram Shastri in this connection. Mr. Shastri was not conversant with the Tibetan language. In order to do justice to the project, Mr. Shastri sought the services of a Tibetan Lama for more than a year to learn the Tibetan language and thus he helped Pope Ved Paul in translating the Tibetan treatise Kangur Tangur into Sanskrit language comprising 1,50,000 couplets. On this meritorious work Maharaja Pratap Singh gave a cash award of rupees 500/- to Pandit Mukund Ram Shastri form the Royal Treasury at a well attended function. Pandit Makund Ram Shastri also helped the Moravian Missionary Dr. A.H. Frankie in deciphering the Ladhakhi Inscription that was found in Drass area .of the valley.

Sir George Grierson edited and translated a number of Kashmiri works that included voluminous extracts from the Mahabharata, namely Krishna Avatar Lila and the Kashmiri Ramayana. Sir George Grierson also edited a portion from the Shiva Purana entitled 'Shiva Parinaya' with a commentary by Pandit Mukund Ram Shastri and got it published during 1914-22 A.D., by the Royal Asiatic Society Bengal, Calcutta in six volumes.

Lord Harding, the Viceroy of India presented the title of Maha Mahopadhyaya to Pandit Mukund Ram Shastri for his contribution in the field of literature. While his sponsor Aural Stein was granted Knighthood that gave him the honour to sit next to the Viceroy, the title of Maha Mahopadhyaya enabled Pandit Mukund Ram Shastri, the privilege of sitting next to the Maharaja of Kashmir.

The love for Sanskrit learning did not remain confined to the European countries alone but it extended even to the U.S.A. by the beginning of the twentieth century. A great American Scholar of Sanskrit language, Dr. Brained Spooner visited Kashmir in 1905 A.D. He met Sanskrit scholars of Kashmir, like Pandit Mukund Ram Sshastri, Pandit Nityanand Shastri, Hara Bhat and others and was full of praise for all these luminaries of the valley. It was during this period that eminent foreign scholars like Sir Aural Stein, George Grierson and Dr. Brained Spooner were busy in the valley making use of the literary abilities of scholars like, Pandit Mukundram Shastri and others for preparing fresh commentaries and critical editions of Kalhana's *Rajatarangini,* the Linguistic Survey of India and four volumes of the *Taitirya Upanishada*. It was at this time that the shining star of Kashmir, Pandit Mukund Ram Shastri, breathed his last in 1921, putting the torch of light in the able hands of Professor Nityanand Shastri who had great aptitude for the research work that was left incomplete by his predecessors.

Prof. Nityanand Shastri

Prof. Nityanand Shastri was the fore runner in the educated class of the valley who attained eminence as a scholar of Sanskrit soon after Sir Aurel Stein recommended him to work with a Dutch scholar Vogel, J. Ph. when he came to the valley in the year 1900 A.D., to study the archaeological remains particularly the remains of the ancient temples and temple ruins in the valley of Kashmir. At that time he was professor of Oriental learning in the recently established Hindu college started in the campus of the then Hindu High School, Srinagar with the combined efforts of Maharaja Pratap Singh and Anne Basent. The institution was later named S. P. College, Srinagar. This recommendation from a scholar like Stein opened the doors of future progress for the young Professor and in return he gave his full services to the Dutch scholar in his ventures. It was due to his strenuous efforts that Vogel put on record while editing the *Antiquities of Chamba State*, published in 1911, that "Pt. Nityanand was recommended to me by Dr. Aural Stein (who) then knew better the learned class of Kashmir".

Sir Aural Stein's publication of Ancient Geography of Kashmir in collaboration with Pt. Govind Kaul in 1896 and then the English version of the *Rajatarangini* with interpretations and

Prof. Nityanand Shastri
(1911 - 1942)

explanations in 1900 A.D., opened the gates of Kashmir study for the western scholars to study and explore the treasure of manuscripts unearthed by the foreigners in the valley of Kashmir and the areas surrounding it. Working with the foreign scholars of repute made the local educated class of the valley more experienced and thus brightened their means of living by helping the fresh scholars in their pursuit of learning. In 1923 A.D. a German scholar, Maurice Winternitz, who had long worked in the field of Indian literature came to Kashmir to study the traditions of Sanskrit language and its impact on Kashmiri literature and the traditions followed by the people of the valley with regard to various aspects of literatures including the Epic traditions. On the recommendations of Aural Stein, Prof. Nityanand Shastri was requested to help the Dutch scholars and with his help, the two volumes of the book entitled History of Indian Literature were published from Calcutta during 1927-30 A.D.

After the death of Govind Kaul in 1899 Sir George Grierson harnessed the services of Pandit Mukund Ram Shastri for the compilation of the Dictionary of Kashmiri. Mr. Shastri worked on the project continuously for a period of 22 years, when the jaws of Death snatched him leaving the project unfinished. So Sir Griorson invited Professor Natyanand Shastri to help him in this venture. Prof. Nityananda worked on the project for a period of 11 years and the dictionary was finally published in the year 1932. While remembering the hard toil and strenuous efforts put in by the scholars, Sir Geiorge Grierson has put on record in one of his letters addressed to his Srinagar Camp Steno that, "…… I also owe a heavy debt of gratitude to Prof. Nityanand Shastri of Pratap Singh College, Srinagar, who placed all his learning at my disposal and helped me in Kashmiri idioms and phrases that had baffled my unaided knowledge. He translated and wrote a commentary on an ancient Kashmiri work Mahanaya Prakash (written in the 14th century) from which I elucidated the history of Kashmiri language." After the publication of the dictionary a Norwegian linguist came to Kashmir for deciphering many linguistic and epigraphic works that had come to light during the first half of the twentieth century and Prof Nityanand Shastri helped him in transliterating this epigraphic job. He, together with Pandit Mukndram Shastri, helped Sir George Grierson in editing and translating a number of Kashmiri works like *Krishna Avatar Leela* and the *Kashmiri Ramayana.*

With the efforts of Pt. Mukund Ram Shastri, Prof. Nityanand Shastri, Hara Bhat and others, the interest towards Sanskrit language began to attract the scholars in the U.S.A. as a result of which Dr. Brained Spooner visited the valley in 1905. Though he himself was a Sanskrit scholar of repute, yet he was impressed by the scholarship of Prof. Nityamand Shastri. Mr. Spooner was interested in the Upanishad literature of India and it was at his request that Prof Nityanand wrote a commentary on the *Taitiriya Upanishada* in four volumes in 1930.

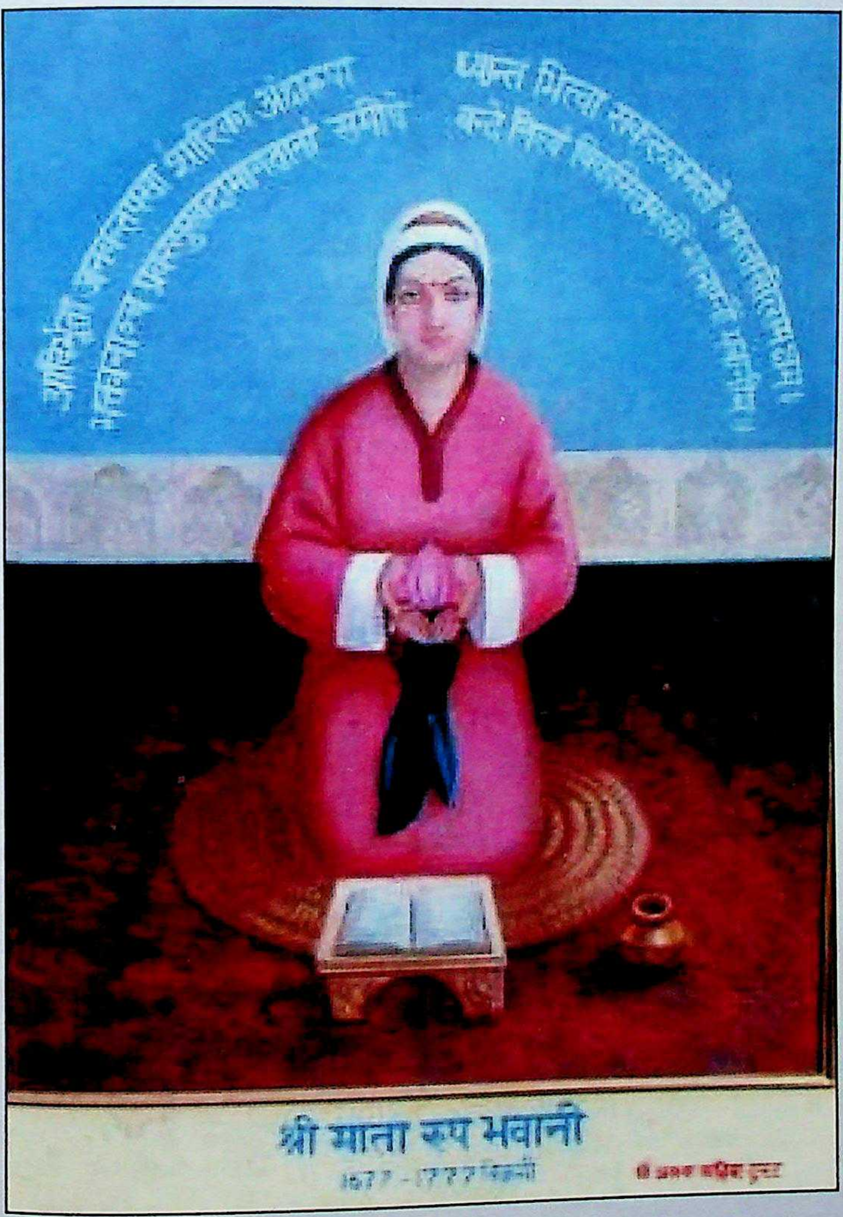
In the year 1938-39 a Dutch scholar came to Kashmir to study the customs, ceremonies and rituals referred to in the *Nilamata Purana* and it is revealed from the perusal of a letter dated March 17, 1939 written by Sir Aural Stein to his stenographer based in Kashmir, which, besides other things, reads that, "I should also be glad to learn from Nityanand which Pandit he would recommend for supplying reliable information to a Dutch scholar about customs, ceremonies, etc. mentioned in the *Nilamata.*"

An extract from a letter dated Jan. 25, 1935 written by A. Stein to Ram Chand, his Steno, from Naples (Italy) clearly states that the health of Prof Nityanand was not very sound during the concluding part of his life. It says, "….I am sorry to learn from your letter the sad condition of Pandit Nityanand, the last of my old Kashmir scholar friends. May it be given to me to see him in better health, on my hoped return to Kashmir towards the close of May. …… Please give my kindest good wishes to Pt. Nityanand, who will do well to remain at Jammu until the late spring." This letter is a clear proof of the devotion and respect that this scholar of world fame had for his subordinate Kashmiri Pandit scholar..

It appears that the political situation in the valley had changed to a great extent till the year 1940 during which period Sir Aural Stein made a hasty survey of Kashmir valley in connection with the revised edition of the *Rajatarangini.* During this period it is revealed that he, on his second visit in 1940, was neither a State guest nor had he an ambition of any long stay in the valley. During this period he opened his camp office in the building of the Postmaster General, at the Band, Srinagar, because his letters of this period bear the address of the Postmaster. One such letter dated November 13, 1940 addressed to his old helper Ram Chand reads as under,

"I am just now completing my tour in Kashmir valley made for the purpose of securing photographs to illustrate all ancient sites, ruins etc., for a new edition of my *Rajatarangini* translations. It has been interesting to visit all those old places with which I first became acquainted 52 years ago".

In the year 1942, the ruler of Bahawalpore State (Sindh) requested Sir Aural Stein for the survey of old sites of historical importance that existed there in that state. He took the said project in hand in the same year in December. From here, Stein, who was staying in the vicinity of the Postmaster's residence/ office (Letter bears the address C/O Postmaster, Bahawalpore,) writes on Jan 10, 1943 to his Kashmir Steno in reply to his letter of December, 24, 1942. Besides other things, the letter sates, " ….. I am very sorry to learn Pandit Nityanand's departure." This indicates that the great scholar of Kashmir had breathed his last some time on or before 24th of December, 1942 and with his death ended the golden period of Kashmir's Literary Renaissance.


श्री माता रूप भवानी
1677 - 1777 विक्रमी

Mata Rupa Bhawani

5. Rupa Bhawani

The Seventeenth Century Saint Poetess of Kashmir

Rupa Bhawani, Ro'pa' De'd, Ro'pa' Ma'j and Alkheshori are different names given to the incarnation of Mother Goddess Sharika Bhagwati, proudly seated at the famous Sharika Peetha on the Hari Parbat, Hillock, Srinagar, Kashmir also known as Pradhyuman Peetha in our ancient literature. On the first day of bright half of Ashwin (Shokla Paksha Pratipadhya), considered to be most auspicious day and also known as the first day of the Autumn Navaratra,. The Mother bestowed a boon on one of Her most illustrious devotees, Madhav Joo Dhar, who had involuntarily arrived at Her auspicious seat on Hari Parbat at midnight instead of early dawn in the year 1620 A.D. In his devotional trance he wished to have goddess Sharika as a small girl in his lap and he heard the Mother saying, "O! Madhav, the best among my devotees, I shall take birth in your house and shall bestow on you the pleasure of spending my childhood in your lap as your baby girl as wished by you". On hearing these words Mr. Dhar came out of his trance. The year 1620 A.D. was a year of extended lunar month of the Vakrami Samvat (1677) and the Sankranti for the month of Kartika extended over a period of two consequent months known as Adhik Mas in the astrological terminology and commonly known as Malamas/ Bhanumas. Thus the nine months' period ended on the first day of the bright half of Jyashtha and on the fifteenth day of the bright half of Jayashtha (1621 A.D.) (Puranmashi), a girl child was born at Madhav Joo Dhar's house at Deddamar – a centrally located place between Saura (Nowshera) and Chhatabal, the down town areas of the present day city of Srinagar. Previously this whole area was known as Pradhyuman Peetha and it got the name of Deddamar as a Vihara was built by Queen Didda, (980-1003 A.D.), in the vicinity of this area.[1] Bhawani was born when the moon was stationed in the Scorpio zodiac sign and this was enough for the learned father of the girl to predict the un-congenial atmosphere that the child shall have to face at her in-laws house or she might even have complete disinclination for a married life. He consoled himself considering it to be the wish of the Great Mother in having given birth to the child on such a horal occasion.

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[1] P.s. Kalhana, *Rajatarangini* ,Vol. I, Book, VI,v.,300,fn.,Book, VII v.,11, Book, VIII, v.,349 and , Vol, II, P.,.448.

The house of Madhav Joo Dhar was often visited by the hermits, Sadhus and Saints. People of great learning from far and near often assembled here, preferably during various pilgrimage periods and discussed the deep secrets of various religious concepts. One among such seldom and special visitors, who mostly kept himself confined to his hermitage alone, was Syada Vibhuti who lived at Ganpathyar, Srinagar. (The sub-caste of Syada', is still held by some of the Brahmin families of Srinagar city). He was a staunch follower of Mother Goddess and had attained a place of prestige as a devotee of the Mother. For this reason, people called him "Siddha Vibhuti"- 'a man of unlimited spiritual powers and perfection.' To a commoner he was an ordinary man having no special qualities, but for men of knowledge, he was a store-house of wisdom. They called him, "Siddha Vibhuti", a giver of all 'Siddhis', whereas he was an ordinary person for a common man who nicknamed him as. "Syadabuti", 'a simpleton' But in reality, he was an enlightened soul who knew of Rupa Bhawani being an incarnation of Mother Goddess, "Sharika". Madhav Joo Dhar was celebrating the Annaprashan Sanskar (eating of solid food by a child for the first time) at his Deddamar (Safakadal) residence. At the end of the ritual Madhav offered a pot containing rice-sugar-milk pudding to the girl child, Bhawani, but she did not touch it because she knew that Her most loved devotee, Siddha Vibhuti, had not been offered the pudding as yet. Madhav Joo understood reason for the refusal of the child and he immediately approached Siddha Vibhuti at his Ganpathyar hermitage. The hermit, who generally lived in the interior of his cottage, was, as if, waiting anxiously for the rice pudding and as soon as Madhav Joo approached the hermit with the bowl of pudding, he uttered Sholaka No: 14, of the first canto of Panchastavi that says:

Oh Devi Tripura ! Destroyer of our sins.

You are an obstruction to all our obstructions;
Brahmins venerate You by offering milk,
Kshetrayas worship You with purified butter;
Vaishas worship You with honey and,
You fulfill the wishes and desires of all of them instantly

The hermit took a mouthful of pudding from the pot. He was instantly blessed with eternal light and continued in that very state for a pretty long time. Madhav Joo took the remaining Kheer to his daughter, who immediately extended her hands for it as soon as she saw her father back from the hermit.

Rupa, grew up into a sensible and matured girl from the very childhood in a congenial and spiritually charged atmosphere of the Dhar family and attained youthfulness in this saintly atmosphere earlier than expected. The father became anxious for the marriage of his beloved daughter, Rupa and after a lot of search and selection she was married to Hirananda Sapru – who belonged to a well to do family of Saprus, a well established sub caste among the Hindus of the valley. It was the keen desire of the Great Mother to give the benefit of "Kanyadan" to her father, Madhav Joo Dhar. During the Kanyadan Sanskar, the "Atha Vas", ritual (the occasion when the couple hold the hands of each other,) was being held, the hermit Siddha Vibhuti arrived there. While laughing out of joy at such an act of the Mother, he narrated Shaloka No 1 of the canto IV of Panchastavi , that says:

One whom the Rishis call the Basic Eternal Power,
Whom the Shrutis consider as the Eternal Secret Power,
Who is the beauty of Lord Shankara in the form of Ardhan-Narishovara, and who protects us all from ordeals,
It is amazing that the Mother seeks the hand of some body else' (extending Her hand to Hirananda Sapru).

There are a number of miraculous acts that are attributed to Rupa Bhawani while she was staying at different places during the period of her seeking, "Gyan Sadhana". She left the house of the Saprus when all her efforts proved fruitless in bringing round her mother-in-law and her husband from doing wicked deeds and conspiring against her. A short sketch of a few such of her acts is recorded here for the readers;

1. The soft witted Brahman (Kula Guru) of the Sapru family attained wisdom and he became a store house of knowledge with the grace of Mata Rupa Bhawani
2. Astonishment of her self-conceited and greedy mother-in-law, who had previously declared the pot of Kheer (rice-sugar-milk pudding) received from the parental house of Bhawani as insufficient for distribution among her all family members and relatives, was found to be more than sufficient,
3. Sending back of the cleaned container through the waters of the river Vitasta to her father who was offering his evening Sandhya Prayers at its banks at Deddamar, Safakadal;
4. Making the life of Lal Chand of Manigam more prosperous and smooth for the services that he had rendered to the Mother throughout the period of her wanderings in pursuit of spiritual ascention,
5. Subsiding the pride and ignorance of Shah Qalander, a Sofi Saint poet of Lar. Ganderbal., on the banks of Shah Ko'l,
6. Restoration of eye sight to the blind son of a Muslim devotee (Mr Malik), at Vaskur village; and
7. Bestowing a job on Shri Bala Dhar, her less educated nephew, at the Royal Court, who, consequently rose to fame at the Mughal Darbar, Delhi, through her spiritual intervention.

Though an incarnation of Mother Goddess Sharika, Rupa Bhawani lived the life of a common Kashmiri Hindu woman in the society and she was aware of the evils that existed in the society during the seventeenth century. There is no doubt that a study of the Vakh literature that this great poetess has left to illuminate the path of her devotees, can easily put her among the Shaivite group of poets but that does not exclude her poetry from other genres of creative thought that prevailed in the valley since long. She opposed the rituals and sacrificial rites of the religion wherein the "Bali" (sacrifice) of an animal was considered essential to please various deities. This period was a continuity of the darkest period that had began in the history of Kashmir from the twelfth century and the sway of the Pathan rule was at its peak, when Bhawani was born. The rules for creation and study of such literary forms as, poetry, drama, poetics, and various philosophic writings in the local language or script till then produced in the valley, had received a setback due to the overall supremacy and adoption of the Persio/Arabic poetics and linguistic influence over the Sanskrit /Sharada or even on the local Kashmiri language. The old language of the valley and the Sharada script was now confined to a small section of Hindu Brahmin society of the valley. It had remained scattered for centuries together as a negligible stock on the bookshelves that had escaped the eye of the miscreants and its use or utterance at the public places was considered vulgar and hence barred. The local folk poetry "Lola Shayiri" had come under the influence of Persian poetics and the same was the case with the poetry of the Sofis and Saints. It was the age of Mathnavis and long narrations written under the Persian influence. In such a state of affairs we find surprisingly the peculiarities of the fourteenth century Vakh tradition alive in the Vakhs of Mata Rupa Bhawani and it is refreshing that she brought this tradition again to life even after a lapse of more than four centuries. She worked for the Hindu Muslim brotherhood all her life and practiced it in letter and spirit throughout her life. It was due to this very fact that the eyes of both the communities were wet when she departed from this unreal world after living a life of complete one hundred years. It was the seventh day of the dark half of the month of Magha and the year was 1721 A.D. when she left this mortal world.

The treasure of literature left by this great poetess that has reached to us, comprises a collection of 145 Vakhs. From the literary, philosophical and linguistic point of view these Vakhs are a treasure and can open new windows for the students and scholars of Kashmiri language and its literature if analyzed more attentively on the modern lines from the linguistic point of view. These Vakhs can be put into three categories as per details given below.

1. In the major portion of the Vakhs that Bhawani has left for us,114 Vakhs discuss in detail the splendor and the

manifestation of the Supreme. It is a philosophical presentation and can be categorized as "Gyan Khand". Bhawani has composed these generally in the approved four lined Vakh tradition as reproduced below:

Dayi asi ti taara truya Avataare,
Yusuya gaaraan su su'tee chuh; I
Bronh bronh pakith do'yi haa lo'se,
Nyath po'shi ta' suya chuya saath II

I wish, God may ferry a lady like me across the waters of this vast ocean!
He is within me and I search for Him in the outer world,
The more one moves forward the sooner the duality shall vanish,
The Eternal is attained and the moment is auspicious.

In all these Vakhs, the poetess has discussed the philosophy of emancipation and acquiring of true knowledge within the approved Vakh traditions. Besides, the poetess knows that she is an incarnation of Mother Goddess, but still she feels soft at heart for being a lady, as is evident from the perusal of some of her Vakhs including the one cited above.

2. The second part is a collection of ten Vakhs that can be categorized under the title, "Nirvana Dashiki" and in this part Bhawani has thrown light on the path of Eternal Bliss, "Nirvana" or Salvation. The Vakhs under this heading are different from the set Vakh patterns as far as their meter and length is concerned. Some of these Vakhs have three, four, five and even six lines. As an example a Vakh is quoted here:

Na jaaya na janmi dagda karmakaandi,
Yathaa shaant basmi aroopaa swaroopam I
Su sarva so'khi adeeho samaadhi,
Amoohaa saavadhaanam that nishkal niraakaar ;
Antar mukhi drishti nirvaana rahasya tati parama gati II

He is neither born nor is born any body from Him. Like a staunch Karmakandi his body is half burnt. He is completely without any body-formation (Nirakar). But he enjoys Himself in tranquility like us, (with body). He, being formless, is still associated with the universe and though nobody is born from Him, yet He lives outside the limits of our time and space. One has to search all these qualities within one's own self and such an attainment is the highest liberation of one's soul.

3. The third variety is a group of 10 Vakhs categorized as the Pratibhigya Darshan – the philosophy of Self Recognition. In this portion some of the Vakhs are generally having either two lines or four lines. A glimpse of such Vakhs is given here:

Idaa na Pinglaa sa cha Brahma Naadi ;
Swayam su upaayaa Sushamnaahamevo I
Anaahat anaamaya su turiya avasthaa ;
Aananda pad su Parambrahma soham II

There is neither Ida nor Pingla not even Sushamna group of ducts there but still He resides in the Sushamna Nadi. He Himself is flawless and nobody can cause any injury to Him. He is Himself in the fourth stage of Eternal Bliss and the same Bliss resides within me. (One has to strive to acquire this Bliss.)

4. The last part comprises 11 Vakhs that explain the state of mind of a devotee when he finds himself in the ocean of Eternal Bliss or Moksha. It is a stage of complete tranquility "Parama Ananda" that can easily be felt by the seeker, but it is very difficult to express it in words. These Vakhs have either six or four lines each Here is one such Vakh explained:

Ikuth chhu Parambood Sadaanandaa,
Tas vyod yas samaad swar aasye I
Ryed Syed Vidhya yas andar aasye,
Tas padvi ro's beyi kya aasye II

The expression of Eternal Bliss, "Parama Ananda" is free from the bounds of time and space, mind and thought. It can be felt by a devotee who is blessed with the deep trance, "Smadhi". One who is blessed with (1) Knowledge, "Gyana", (2) Siddhi, "accomplishment," and (3) Salvation, "Nirvana" – the three essential stages for the attainment of Eternal Bliss, ".Siddhi". One can reach to this most elevated stage only after mastering the three said blessings.

Out of a number of manuscripts containing the Vakhs of the poetess preserved in the State Research Department Library, it was found by the author, while compiling, annotating, editing and transliterating the Vakhs of the saint poetess and presenting them in a book form for the purpose of introducing the teaching of Rupa Bhawani at the Under-graduate and Post-graduate levels of Studies in Kashmitri, in late seventies of the last century, the Sharada manuscript preserved by late Shri Vasudeva Raina of Pinglina (Pulwama) was the best preserved one, besides being more authentic and accurate [1].

The Nirvan and the Jayanti days of this great luminary of the valley are held on the seventh day of the dark half of the month of Magha, and on the bright fifteenth day of the month of Jyeshtha respectively, every year by her devotees. Large congregations are held at various Ashrams established by the members of our community in honour of the Mother Goddess Rupa Bhawani, in different parts of Jammu city and abroad. Attendance at such congregations on the scheduled dates of celebrations and participation in the discussions held on such occasions are a source of blessing to all the seekers of the Mother.

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[1]. The Post-graduate Department of Kashmiri, University of Kashmir, Srinagar, published the project under the title, *"Rupa Bhawani"-Akh Saam,* by S.N. Pandit, in the year, 1983.

Author.

Shri Shakti Ji Maharaaj The Missionary Saint.

6. Shakti Ji Maharaj

The Founder of Rama Krishna Ashram at Jammu

The advent of the twentieth century was the beginning of a renaissance in almost all the fields of knowledge, literature, religion, education in Kashmir and it also revolutionized our scientific thought and day to day living patterns. Everything got revitalized in the life of our community. The welcome to the world famous preachers, saints and seers by us brought a change in the life and thought patterns of our community in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Jagat Guru Shankracharya, Swami Ramakrishen Parmahansa, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Satchidananda and others are among the galaxy of great personalities and luminaries of the Indian sub-continent who travelled to the length and breadth of it so as to awakin conscience of the general public. Besides the above mentioned saints/scholars, a number of other luminaries visited the State of Jammu and Kashmir in search of seclusion and penetrated deep into the far and near areas and the interior most hilly terrains of the State that included the Haramukuta Ganga, (in the Sindh valley). Swami Amarnath Ji, Ksheer Bhawani and other holy places of the State.

Shambhu Nath Dahr, who is also known by the name of "Shakti Ji Maharaj" by his devotees, was born in a respectable Kashmiri Pandit family at Safakadal, Srinagar, Kashmir on the 9th day of the dark fortnight of Phalguna in the year 1915 A.D. He displayed special qualities even when he was a small child. With the passage of time, the boy turned out to be very intelligent and thoughtful. The ancestral family of the young child was well off to afford higher education to the boy and he too showed his worth and brilliance as he graduated in the year 1936 from S.P. College, Srinagar in those dark days of want and repression. He was brought up in the saintly atmosphere of the Dhar family and that too of Safakadal that had links with the progeny of Madhav Joo Dhar, the revered father of Alkheshori, Rupa Bhawani. He learnt Sanskrit, and

Persian languages and studies deeply the Vedas and the Advaitavad propounded by Shri Ram Krishna. He was impressed by Maulana Roomi, Sheikh Saidi and admired the thoughts put forth by the Kashmiri Sofi poets. The worldly charms and desires could not attract the young Shambhu so he left his home in search of Real Solace.

The news regarding the calm and saintly atmosphere of the valley had reached every nook and corner of the sub-continent by then and thinkers, saints and philosophers, as already mentioned, often came to this beautiful valley in search of peace, solace and solitude. One among such saints was Swami Ashokananda who was from Bengal and a follower of Shi Rama Krishna Mission visited the valley during this period and the calm atmosphere and the beauty of the valley attracted him so much that he made his permanent hermitage at Sumbal Kashmir where he was known to the common devotees as the Sumbali Baba. Shri Shambhu Nath Dhar in his wandering, on a cold winter day, reached this Ashram when Swami Ashokananda was resting on a slab. He retorted angrily, "People come for initiation ....the most tedious field." He, however, initiated him after his great persuasion and renamed him as Shakti Chaitanya. After a short stay both of them went to Nagdandi to establish an Asram there. It was during this period that Swami Satchidananda, a direct disciple of Sharada Mata and a staunch follower of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, visited this place and appreciated the managerial abilities, unselfish and dedicated services of Shakti Ji who considered him his Guru thence onwards. Thus, while looking after the developmental works at the Nagdandi Ashram, he became a staunch follower of Shri Ramakrishna Mission and he now spent most of his time in deep meditation, Sadhana. Swami Satchidananda, his Guru, introduced him to Biksha, Yarta, Tapa and Japa as he was very much pleased with his nature of work and he asked him to move deep into the Himalayas for further meditation and for the attainment of Eternal Peace. He spent a few years in further meditation in the Himalayas. He was latter deputy to Himachal and Gujrat and was directed to collect alms from some areas of Delhi and

Rawalpindi. Swami Satchidananda, whom he later called his Guru, initiated him second time.

During the early seventies he was directed to proceed to Jammu to see ways and means for the establishment of Shri Rama Krishna Advaita Ashram. Thus, his long search for a piece of a suitable land for the establishment of the Ashram started on his arrival at Jammu. He explored all the quarters of this small segment but availability of a suitable piece of land for the desired purpose appeared to him impregnable. One day, in his anxiety, when he was strolling aimlessly on a road side in Jammu, a cavalcade of a few Govt., vehicles stopped just close to him and shortly a person from the crew approached him and enquired, “Are you Shamboo Nath Dhar?” The man in the ochre robes replied in affirmative. The man in the uniform asked him to accompany. The hermit followed for he knew that any kind of resistance was undesirable. It was after a long interval that he came to know that he had been taken to some high official’s residence when the man in uniform lead him to the chamber where Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, the then Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, was seated. In fact Bakshi Sahab was a classmate, a co-hockey player and a close friend living in his neighbourhood at Safakadal, Srinagar during his tender age. They often played hockey in the company of other friends at Idghah, the famous play-ground of the city children during those days. The sharp eyes of his friend had identified the man at the first glimpse, though he (Shakti Ji) was in the ochre robes. Shakti Ji revealed these facts to a small gathering of his devotees that also included Mr Omkar Nath Koul, who is at present at Delhi. The good offices of the then Prime Minister and his timely intervention and efforts had made it possible to remove all the hurdles for the procurement of a large stretch of land extending over an area of forty Kanals situated at Udhaywala a very picturesque and lonely corner of the Jammu city[1].

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[1] The information has been revealed to me by Shri Ashok Kotha, of Ashok Nagar, Canal Road, Jammu, who worked as the Secretary to Shakti Ji Maharaj at the time of handing over the Ashram to Shri Ram Krishen Mission at Udhaywala, Jammu in the year 2000 A.D.

From here started the strenuous and independent efforts of Shri Shakti Ji in establishing an Ashram from the very beginning. He started this work from the day he took the possession of the land for the Ashram. The area being very secluded, the first job for this undaunted soldier of the Mission was to find ways and means to give the area the desired look of a habitable place and in this connection he wanted to construct a permanent and all weather connectivity roads from the city up to the Ashram and beyond it. Making a selection of the front portion of the demarcated land for the establishment of the Ashram building, he developed the rest of the area of the Ashram land into a small farm. He partly converted a small portion of it into a mini fruit/ vegetable garden and the land beyond that was meant for growing crops like wheat and paddy. In this way an elementary source of a small income emerged for the Ashram from this land itself. Besides this, the plot of this land came under the administrative control of a person who, for all purposes, was a bonafide citizen of the State of Jammu and Kashmir and it was easy for the Government to make Shri Shakti Chaitanya ji as the legitimate owner of the land. In this way this piece of land became the legitimate property of the Ashram with the timely help by a number of devotees with whose generous and timely help the construction of concrete structures, to house the Sanctum Sanctorum, etc., were undertaken.

This increased the work-load on the shoulders of Mr. Shakti Ji Maharaj. The Ashram became popular among the general populace of Jammu area. A Managing Committee headed by a one man army of (Shri Shakti Ji,) was framed for taking up the development works at Sri Ramakrishna Advaita Ashram. The calm and most serene atmosphere of the Ashram helped holding of daily meetings in the vicinity of the Ashram and a number of people who besides being interested in the missionary work, discussed different spiritual, social and religious problems of the people of the Jammu and Kashmir State. In this way, there emerged a plan for the consideration of the Managing Committee for the initial development of the Ashram. Hence with the passage of time the following structures came up at the Ashram in a phased manner with the continued efforts of the Managing Committee under the President-ship of Shri Shakti ji Maharaj:

1. A small hut to provide suitable residential accommodation to the whole time staff of the Ashram,
2. A small Library fitted with book shelves, etc., and
3. A Meditation Hall and a Temple that presently serves as a dining hall after making small adjustments in it.

With the expansion of the activities of the Ashram, some new building complexes were added in the recent years. These include:

1. The main Temple building,
2. A small Hospital, and
3. A Guest House for pilgrims.

(The beautification and the development of the campus were in full swing when the writer last visited the Ashram in September, 2009).

Shakti Ji Maharaj worked with all zeal and zest for the development of the Udhaywala Ashram and it was with his efforts that great administrative and social personalities like P.N. Chakoo, H.R. Sharma, R..L. Bhalla, Baldev Raj, Mulukh Raj Shastri, Shiva Nath, and others gave physical and even monetary help to the establishment of this Ashram. Literary discussions on the works and achievements of Paramhamsa Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Sharada Mata became a part of the daily activities of the Ashram at the initial stage and the process continued with the development and other activities of the Ashram.

As per the law of nature, old age got over the energetic spirit of this undaunted saint. He spent most of his time in deep meditation and would occasionally rejoice himself in the company of his devotees who often visited his chambers in the Ashram now. He led a simple but meaningful life and he always disliked pomp and show. He never liked to glorify his own self for whatever reason he worked for. He was a hard working, laborious and promising Missionary worker who worked not for fame but for a cause. The thought as what would be the fate of the Ashram after his death in the absence of a selfless worker, always disturbed him? It was due to his strenuous efforts that the Ashram was taken over by the Belur Math Mission Office on 6th December, 2000, that gave solace to Shakti Ji. Though Shakti Ji was the life time President of the Rama Krisham Advaita Mission Ashram, Jammu, yet he was disturbed lest the Ashram should become a property of an unauthorized heir after his demise and to save the Ashram from such hands, he made all efforts during his life time to save it from such a situation. .

It was the most auspicious day of 20th of August, 2001 "Raksha Bandhan" day, the bright fifteenth day of the month of Shravana that this great soul of Kashmir joined the Immortal One and attained Nirvan at a ripe age of more than 86 years. The devotees at the Rama Krishna Advaita Ashram, Jammu celebrate the Jayanti and the Nirvan days of this untiring worker of the Ashram each year on the ninth day of the dark fortnight of the month of Phalguna and on the Raksha Bbandhan day respectively with devotion and reverence and also remember the services of this undaunted Missionary worker by organizing seminars and symposia within the premises of the Ashram at Udhaywala, Jammu.

7. Chandra Joo Bichroo

A Legend Among Kashmiri Saints

The political history of Kashmir had undergone a change with the end of the Mughal rule in the year in 1753 when Abdullah Khan Ishak Aqasi, the commander of the famous Afghan warrior Ahmad Shah Abdali defeated the last Mughal Governor of Kashmir, Abdul Qasim Khan at Shopian and established the Afghan rule over the valley of Kashmir. The ambitious and luxurious nature of the Afghan Governors was main cause that Kabul regime did not last long nor had it any lasting effect on the thinking pattern of the simple and peace-loving general public of the valley. It was due to this very fact that after a gap of just 60 years Atta Mohammad Khan, the Afghan Governor of Kashmir wanted to destabilize the Sikh empire established by Maharaja Ranjit Singh who had by then established the Sikh rule over the whole of the Punjab state that included a major portion of the present day southern Sindh province of Pakistan, even though a perpetual danger from the British forces loomed large on his territory. He (Khan) took this disastrous step without bringing it to the notice of his masters at Kabul. A fierce battle took place near the fort of Attock. Atta Mohammad and his followers fought well but soon he learnt that Vazir Fateh Mohammad Khan, the Kabul Sultan was in his pursuit with a large army. Not willing to go into the hands of Vazir Fatheh Mohammad, he made a treaty with Ranjit Singh's Commander Mohkam Chand. The Fort of Attock was recompensed to the Sikhs. Vazir Khan paid a tribute of six lakh rupees and the territory he ruled as penalty. He also presented Koh-i-Noor, the famous diamond, to Ranjit Singh for he had helped him (Vazir Fateh Mohammad Khan} to acquire the throne of Kabul. Thus the valley came under the Sikh rule in the year 1819 though for a short period to be followed by the Dogra rule through the famous Treaty of Amritsar dated March 9, 1846. The attention and affection that the new rulers gave to their newly gained regime, was nullified by the undue and un-necessary interventions by the British Residents stationed in the state who, as usual, believed in betrayal, divide and rule policy. Coming very close to the concluding quarter of the nineteenth century, the ghastly famine of 1878-79 darkened this part of the century so much so that the after shocks of this famine adversely affected the health of the noble king, Maharaja Ranvir Singh, who passed away in 1885.

During this era of adversity, want and turmoil, Chandra was born on the 3rd day of the bright half of Ashada (Shokla Pakshya), in the year (1816 A.D.) in a very sober Kashmiri Pandit family at the famous village, Bichroo of Tehsil Chadoora, Badgam, Kashmir. It is said that when the child (Chandra) was in his mother's womb, his father was very fond of hearing the Bhagwat Katha and then relating it to his pregnant wife every night. This imbibed a deep love for God in the mind of the lady that was reflected in young Chandra who spent all his leisure time in the remembrance of God from the very childhood. Chandra got formal school education and he also learnt Sanskrit while reciting the Holy Scriptures. He was married to a girl of the same village, Bichroo at an early age when he was just a seven year boy. The quest for initiation on one day abruptly prompted him to renounce his home when he was yet a boy of twelve. He returned to his village after a gap of 11 years and started a small Ashram at the village Bichroo. Dhatatray Ji, a saint from India arrived at village Bichroo when Chandra had established his village Ashram. The Indian saint was very well known among the elders of the village and he was very much attracted by the presence of mind of Chandra who prostrated before the saint and became his disciple at the first sight. The saint felt the behaviour of the young disciple praiseworthy, he lived in his small Ashram for a few years and he left it along with Chandra in pursuit of higher realms under the able guidance of Dattatray Ji, his Guru. It is said that during this period the saint blessed him and before initiating him into the realms of saint-hood he asked his disciple to undergo a great test so as to ensure that the disciple was worthy of being initiated. It is said that Dattatray Ji asked his disciple to bear a hot glowing iron ball on his thigh. It is said that the hot iron ball moved down his thigh without doing any harm or causing any painful wound to him. In this way he was allowed by his Guru to remain a Grahasthi Sadhu. Chandra also fathered three sons and a daughter. By then his fame had reached far a wide for his having attained Tri Shakti – Three powers- Ichha Shakti, (power to curb the desires), Jnyana Shakti,-(power to gain knowledge), and Kriya Shakti.-(power to perform). Now he got the name of Chandra Kak Bichroo among all his devotees who thronged his Ashram everyday. But despite all this name and fame he lacked economic stability and on this account he often felt disturbed

In the mean time, the family responsibilities of Chandra Joo multiplied in the absence of any reliable source of income. One day when he was returning from Sopore to his native village, he fainted at the roadside. Thakur Joo Pandit a resident of down town Srinagar city worked as an employee of the then Revenue Officer at Sopore in those days. He was returning home after his duty. He saw the unconscious man on the road side. Thakur Pandit was himself a saintly person and he felt pity for the fainted man. He got down from his horseback and tried his best to help the man to regain consciousness so that he could relate the cause of his pain to him. When all his efforts failed, he rushed to a nearby well at the road side and in the absence of any bucket; he drenched his turban in the water and sprinkled some water on the face of the moaning person who was now foaming profusely through his mouth. He also squeezed some water from the turban into the mouth of the man. After a few seconds the fainted person regained consciousness and he related his story of his adversity to Thakur Pandit who then took him to his Srinagar house on the horse-back.

'Pandit Sahab', as Thakur Joo was known in the vicinity of his Mohalla, the environment of the Pandit's house suited Chandra and he wished to stay in the house of his saviour quite longer. 'The ways of God are varied', the Almighty rewarded him (Thakur Joo) for his noble acts and he was elevated as the Revenue Officer of Sopore by the then State Govt. with his station at Srinagar. Thus the duties of Thakur Pandit, besides the disposal of matters relating to the Revenue Department, included the collection of the State's share of paddy from the farmers and then getting it properly stored in the store houses, called Kothars so that the collection could properly be deposited with the State Exchequer on the due date. Thus the Pandit attained the name of Kotha-dhari as his surname and in due course of time he became Thakur Kotha. Knowing that his guest was himself an enlightened soul, he wanted to adjust Chandra (Pandit Sahib) as Mr. Kotha called him, on the post of a Munshi in the Revenue Department through his official influence for he was pleased to retain this saintly and sincere man in his small establishment. But Pandit Sahab, (Swami Ji) refused to accept the offer politely for he wished to stay and work as a helper for him at his house in case he wished him to do so. Thakur Joo, not fully aware of the spiritual attainment of Chandra (Pandit Sahib), employed him as his personal help to look after the house hold affairs. Thus the life for the family of Chandra Joo became economically more comfortable. The elevation to the higher post of his master, kept all the amenities of life at the disposal of his (Chandra's) family. In the mean time Thakur Kotha left the remote area of the down town Nawakadal, Srinagar city and he shifted his new residence to Malla Pora, Bhana Mohalla area of the main city, where his progeny, Prof Chuni Lal Kotha lived till our present exodus from the valley.

Swami Ji, was now addressed as Pandit Sahib at the Kotha house. He would look after the affairs of the Kotha house and also saddled his horse for the official trips of the master. Once, Thakur Kotha, on the eve of his departure for the official tour, felt that his horse was not saddled properly. He got annoyed with Chandra Joo. In order to teach Pandit Ji a lesson he went to his room to pour out his wrath. Reaching there, he was amazed to see Swami Ji sitting in Abhaya Mudra and in deep Smadhi with a luminous halo around his body. This state of affairs humbled him and he fell down at his feet and apologized for his rude behaviour. Since then Thakur Joo and his family revered this spiritually awakened man and always held him in great respect and devotion.

Now Swami Ji would often visit his house at village Bichroo. Chandra Joo Bichroo had by now attained the name of 'Pandit Sahib' and his devotees would call him Swami Ji. He married both his sons and his daughter was married to Mukund Ram Dhar of Vicharnag whose son was the famous saint Naran Joo Dhar. Naran Joo Dhar was not interested in the worldly affairs from the very childhood. After getting formal elementary education, he left his home and is said to have attended the Ashram at Nagdandi, Achabal for a couple of years. He had three brothers. His younger brother, namely Keshav Dhar, was a Government employee, Bala Dhar and Jana Dhar both worked in the Medical Department as Doctors. All of them tried their best to bring back their elder brother into the family fold but they did not succeed in their efforts. Constant approaches by the family members to bring the enlightened man back into the family fold compelled Naran Joo Dhar to attain complete Sannyas and thus his whereabouts after his retreat from the Nagdandi Ashram are shrouded in mystery till date. The progeny of Keshav Dhar lived at Vicharnag till the exodus of the Kashmiri Pandits from the valley in the year 1990.

Chandra Joo Bichroo, after being free from the family worries, spent most of his time in the company of Thakur Joo Kotha at his Bhana Mohalla residence. Besides, Thakur Kotha, Bala Kak Peshin, Tika Lal Khazanchi, Prakash Ram, Deva Ram, and Gopal Joo were among his most revered followers and they often sat in the company of Swami Ji for hours together. Long penance and meditation made him an elevated saint and many miracles are attributed to him. A few of these are described below:-.

1. Once one of his devotees who was a resident groom in a family at the Bichroo village, offered physical help to Swami Ji in repairing the Ashram at Bichroo. He worked as a labourer during the renovation work of the Ashram and for putting in this physical labour he was

spurned by his in-laws. The disciple was very close to Swami Ji and had got a magnetic touch of spirituality from his Guru. Swami Ji wished him to attain prosperity and got him deputed to Nepal as a missionary of the Bhakti Moment.

2. On another occasion, on the day of Jwala Chaturdashi, held on the bright fourteenth day of Ashada (Shokla Chaturdashi), his wife desired to attend the abode of the Mother Goddess at Jwala Parvat at Khrew, Kashmir. Swami Ji readily agreed but remarked that it was not possible for the old couple to travel all this distance and get a chance of Darshan at the sanctum sanctorum because of the great rush of people that assembled there at the shrine of the Devi on that particular date. So he advised his spouse to cleanly besmear the small Pooja room (Thokur Kuth) so that they could pray there to have the glimpse of the Devi. The wife did as she was asked to do. After taking a bath, both dressed themselves in clean clothes and started worshipping the deity. A glass of milk, candy sugar, almond kernels, etc., were kept as an offering for the deity. When both of them were in deep meditation, all of a sudden the whole prayer-room was lit up with a bright and soothing glow of light. Immediately and instantly the room was filled with a dazzling glow and in this flash the Goddess Jwala Ji appeared before the devotees in all Her luster and glory. Both of them felt eternal ecstasy when the Devi blessed them after touching the Naived kept there as an offering.

3. Swami Ji generally celebrated the birth-day of his eldest son Sahaz Kak with great pomp and show. On one such occasion he had invited a number of guests who took the Naived in a number of rooms of the Ashram house. Still some latecomers had to wait for their turn to get the Naived. They witnessed the presence of Swami Ji in all the rooms at one and the same time while he was entertaining the guests in a number of rooms.

4. After the marriage of his daughter, one day his daughter approached her mother complaining that her in-laws behaved coldly with her and often insulted her for the

meager Atagath [1] she brought from her parent's house on her every visit. When Swami Ji came to know of this, he asked his daughter to go to the Vicharnag Spring (Nagabal) and dip her hand into the water of the pond in one of its corners. On her next visit she obeyed the orders of her father. To her utter astonishment there came a precious and a glittering gem into her hand which she offered to her mother-in-law as her Atagath. The in-laws felt glad and also perplexed. Thus the honour of the daughter-in-law was restored in the whole house and the earlier bitterness faded away.

5. Once the son-in-law of Swami Ji fell seriously ill. His wife approached Swami Ji, wailing and weeping for help. On his visit he saw that his daughter was weeping bitterly at the death bed of her husband. She approached her father to save her husband at all costs. Swami Ji tried his best to impress upon her that the life of every human being was pre-determined and could not be altered at any cost. But the daughter would not listen. She asked her father that she was ready to sacrifice her own self to save her husband so as to prevent her own self from the evil fate of a widow life. Swami Ji agreed and asked his daughter to circumambulate round the deathbed of her husband. She obeyed the command. Immediately and instantly she was taken seriously ill and she passed away. The husband rose from the death bed and regained his health once again.

6. It was in the year 1913 that on one morning the spouse of Shri Thakur Kotha approached this learned soul, wailing and weeping because her husband had abruptly passed away. Though the saint tried his best to explain to her that the date and time of death were fixed for every body and could not be altered but the lady did not listen to any of his explanations. At last he addressed the weeping lady saying that there were only twelve years of his own life at his personal disposal that he could bestow on his disciple. The lady agreed and thus the enlightened soul attained the realm

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[1]. For details p.s. Kashmir Hindu Sanskars, by the author, year, 2006 pp., 246(fn), 253 (fn),257-58,264-65,318 and 356.

of Shiva on the third auspicious day of Ashwin Shokla Paksha in the year (1856 A.D.) at a very young age of 40 years. Shri Thakur Kotha is reported to have survived for a period of exactly twelve years after the date of this episode. [1]

Swami Ji led a family life though he was spiritually an awakened soul. He always led a secluded life away from all publicity. He was a staunch believer of "Bahu Jana Sukhaya, Bahu Jana Hitaya" and he worked for this doctrine all his short life. The pen, the inkstand and some of his writings are in the safe custody at the house of Prof Chuni Lal Kotha, who is presently living at Pune, as the remnants of this great soul. Nand Lal ji, the elder son of Chandra Joo Bichroo and many devotees celebrate both the days of Jayanti and Nirvan of Swami Ji, on the third day of the bright fortnight of Aashada and Ashwina respectively every year. Both these occasions are celebrated with great devotion and reverence. Prasad (food and drinks) is served to a large number of devotees and pilgrims by the descendents of Nand Lal Ji and the Kothas who assemble on both these occasions to offer their reverence to this learned soul of selfless service to the humanity.

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[1] An account of the miracles etc., of *Swami Ji* was initially revealed to the author by Sh. Soom Nath Kotha of Ashok Nagar, Canal Road Jamm*u* and it corroborated with the article on SwamiI Ji by Sh. P.N. Razdan (Mohnoori) entitled "The miracle saint of Kashmir – Swami Chandrajoo Bichroo" . Author.

Pandit Keshava Nath Ji
First victim of Kashmir Militancy

8. Pandit Keshava Nath Ji,

First Victim of Militancy in Kashmir

"Pandit Ji", popularly known to all the residents of Vicharnag and to the people living in its close vicinity like, Novshera, Vonta Bhowan (Ananta Bhawan), Saura, and Batsa'pora, belonged to a respectable Kashmiri Brahmin family of Gairoo, (Noor Pora), Tehsil, Tral. Keshava was born on the first day of the dark fortnight of Magha (Krishna Paksha Pratipadhya) in the year 1916 in a modest Kashmiri Brahmin family. He was introduced to the study of religious scriptures written in Sharada script that specifically included the "Karmakand" and "Jotish", from the very early stage. In pursuit of learning he went to Bijbihara, Shopian and Srinagar, where he attended the normal school education also up to the eighth standard. His father, Shridhar Pandit, a disciple from the famous Jotshi clan of Vejibroar (Bijbihara), was a famous Pandit when the cruel jaws of death devoured him at the prime of his age. Keshava was yet very young and the burden of the family, that included his mother, aged uncle, grand mother and other members of the family like his two younger brothers and an infant sister, fell on his shoulders. The untimely death of his father had made the boy a secluded person. In order to help his widowed mother in her family chores, the friends and relatives advised his early marriage. Thus he got married in a very chaste Brahmin family of Vasudeva Raina of Pinglina, Pulwama, Kashmir at a very young age. But the days of his Grahasta Ashram were limited because the pious lady died in the prime of her youth in 1946, just seven years after her marriage, leaving behind two small children. The untimely death of his wife was a turning point in the life of the young man. He discarded the very thought of a second marriage. Fortunately, his younger brother, Jia Lal Pandit, was married to his sister-in-law that proved a blessing in disguise for the family in the long run for it filled the gap created in the family due to the untimely death of a member. The very fact that his young kids were adjusted in the joint family, consoled the tender heart of the father and gave him peace of mind. Thus his concentration in spirituality and urge for renunciation of the world, "Sannyas" increased more than his absorption in the family matters.

He now attended the shrine of Mother goddess regularly "Rajnya" at Tulamula on all the auspicious days in general and on the 8th day of the bright half of every month in particular. Transport facilities in those days were very poor. He often visited the holy shrine on foot from his home. Generally he would prefer his night stay at Vicharnag, the last Hindu habitat at a distance of 10 km. to the north of the main Srinagar city. Some well to do Hindu families inhabited this village during those days. The serene atmosphere of the place and beautiful and calm environment of the Asthapan suited his saintly nature. Moreover, the people of the place were not less affectionate and they would wait for his every arrival. Thus the durations of his stay at the said Asthapan increased on his every visit to the holy shrine of Mother Goddess. His longer stays were liked by the people of Vicharnag and they welcomed it. In order to benefit from his able guidance, the arrangement for his stay was made at the hospice of the Asthapan that had been constructed for the purpose of starting a Pathshala and the Hindu populace of the Mohalla, including the young, assembled in the morning and evening to listen to the religious discourses during his stay there. Finally, at the request of the members of the Trust Asthapan Vicharnag, he made up his mind to stay at the Asthapan from early 1956 onwards. Although he led the life of a hermit yet his social contacts swelled day by day. His personal physical needs decreased and he now took a single meal and devoted most of his time in deep penance. His sleep was confined hardly to three to four hours daily.

Due to his permanent stay at the Asthapan from the year 1956 onwards, the other members of his family including his children who were adults by now, often visited the Asthapan. With the arrival of the cousins and other family members of Pandit Ji's joint family from his native village, it almost looked as if there was an addition of one more Hindu family in the Vicharnag Mohalla. His children and cousins now attended their colleges from Vicharnag and in this way the family ties of the hermit remained in tact and closer than ever before.

The circle of devotees, comprising both Hindus and Muslims of the neighbourhood including a few from Srinagar city and even from far off villages, increased with the arrival of every dawn. It was perhaps due to his affection, love and sober nature that some more Hindu and Muslim families, who previously lived in other parts of the city and the valley, constructed their houses here in the vicinity of Vicharnag. Thus life-activity started at this lonely and neglected area once again. The dream land of Utpal Deva and Shriya Bhat once again felt the fragrance of the spring blossoms. The brotherhood of the people of this area was once again on the right track but unfortunately that did not last very long as the situation in the valley underwent a change from 1986 onwards after the destruction and desecration of the temples in the Anantnag area by communal miscreants. A feeling of insecurity had started developing in the minority community in the valley. Still the situation was not as critical as to hinder the normal activities of people. Police personnel were posted by the State Government to keep an eye on the miscreants lest they should damage the religious places of the minorities and worsen the situation. In this way the Asthapan of Vicharnag also came under the vigil of the Government and two/three Police personnel were stationed at the temple and housed in one of the rooms of the hospice of the Asthapan in early 1987. It being the winter season, old man living in the Asthapan building, treated them as his new guests and arranged firepots and a supply of charcoal for them so as to make their stay comfortable during the cold season. He would occasionally ask his kith and kin or his devotees, present on the occasion, to prepare Qahwa for them when they returned after their late night patrolling. At times he would himself prepare tea for them and they readily took it with joy.

In the first week of November, 1988 it was noticed that the health of the hermit was deteriorating and the increased influx of people and other devotees to the Ashram worsened it further. He was medically advised to move to his native village for a short period so as to take rest till his health improved. Unwillingly, he moved to his native village on 6th November, 1988. The timely medical treatment, proper diet and rest, made him quite hale and hearty after a few days of stay there. Now here also his devotees started coming to him. He even himself visited the houses of some of his devotees and friends in the vicinity of the village. Soon the news reached Srinagar and Vicharnag. Thus the devotees started coming from Srinagar to the village. He felt that the people had to travel such long distances to meet him so he desired to move to his hermitage at Vicharnag for a few days so that his presence pleased his devotees. There was no alternative but to obey the command. It was the fateful day of 5th December 1988, Monday when, escorted by his children, he returned to Vicharnag to meet his devotees there. It was also agreed that arrangements for a two-three days stay there was sufficient for him. On Wednesday, the 7th December he was requested by his children and other devotees to return to the native village for further improvement of his health but he desired to continue his stay for a day or two more and it was mutually decided that he would move to his home town on Saturday, the 10th of December, 1988 in the morning. The police personnel deputed by the Station House Officer, Saura Police Station, arrived and paid respects to him. While meeting them, Pandit Ji, as the locals called him, immediately recognized one of the Policeman namely, Ghulam Mohammad who belonged to the earlier lot of guards while the second one (a Policeman) deputed by the Saura Police Post, recently) gave his name as Mohd.Yousuf, who was with a short beard, and was a fresh recruit. The ferocious face of the fellow and his vicious look was the index of his mind. People had noticed that his eyes turned red as some local Muslim ladies came enquiring after the health of "Pandit Ji". He even rebuked them secretly when they left the building. This arrogant nature of the new recruit had been brought to the notice of the hermit who said, "The fellow is a young boy and a fresh recruit. It will take him some time to be worthy of his uniform. We are senior to him in age, '*Chhima Badan Ko Chahiye Chhotan Ko Utpaat'*, "The elders should learn to forgive the mistakes of the juniors" were the words with which he answered the devotees.

As agreed to earlier, the elder son of the hermit reached Vicharnag on Friday, the 9th Dec. 1988, late in the evening. It being a cold December night he, as usual, asked his son, late at night, to prepare two Kangris for the Policemen. The poor fellow could not refuse for he knew that in that case his father would himself do it. At around 12 at night both the Police Personnel returned from their routine patrol. Qahwa was prepared and served to them before bidding them good night. At around 3.30 a.m. (early dawn on Saturday the 10th of December, 1988), the hermit woke up as usual. He took the flash light in his hand and was about to leave the bed when he heard a knock on the door. He got up and asked as to who was there. The knock was repeated. He opened the door and suddenly somebody pulled him out forcibly and dashed him against the stones of the stairs leading to the ground floor of the building. His son, while still lying in the bed, heard the voice of Pandit Ji, shouting in pain," *Wahi Ma'jai*" 'Oh my mother'. He sprang towards the door and saw the young Police Constable (Mohd Yousuf) striking the head of the old man with his rifle butt and shouting at him, "*Islam Qabool Karo*" "Embrace Islam.." On seeing one more person at the door he took the service rifle in both his hands and from the half opened door he saw the policeman in half darkness aiming the gun at him. He had no alternative but to shut the door. In the mean time he heard the sound of opening the window of the 1st floor room of the building where the watchman (Chowkidar) of the Asthapan and his wife lived. He also heard the shouts of the Constable asking them to close all the doors and windows. The Chowkidar while closing the window shouted at him from the side window to the north of the building to close the door and keep the lights off. The Killer was still crying repeatedly, "*Oh! Bhatta, Islam Quabool Karo*",'Oh! Pandit, embrace Islam'. The old man had fallen on the ground motionless; perhaps the first stroke of the rifle butt on his head had made an end to his life.

In the mean time the people of the whole Mohalla had assembled out side the boundary wall of the Asthapan at the blind corners. The Chowkidar couple and the elder son of the hermit secretly crossed the boundary wall from the back door and raised an alarm on the road outside. Some people had rushed to the Police Post, Saura, to inform the police. The killer police constable was running about the Asthapan premises including the compound of the Asthapan building in search of the Chowkidar and the man who had seen him striking the old man so that he could kill the eye witness of his crime. The timely action of the Chowkidar, assembling of the local people and the arrival of a contingent of Police under the command of a Sikh S.H.O from Saura, made the killer Sepoy panicky and that saved the life of all others. The S.H.O. engaged the gun wielding policeman in conversation under a Chinar tree while the other Police personnel caught the culprit from behind and thus disarmed him immediately.

It was now early morning and the whole Asthapan area was packed with people, both Hindus and Muslims, young and old. The eyes of small children too were wet, because they loved "Pandit Ji", as their teacher. More contingents of police came to tackle the law and order problem. In order to hasten the matter, the police wanted immediate removal of the dead body for post-mortem and for the last rites. But the people who had assembled there wanted to register an F.I R. against the police man in the presence of the party/community leaders like Tika Lal Tapiloo, A. N. Vaishnavi and the D.C., Srinagar who had arrived to pacify the people. The Police seemed helpless before the peaceful mob that had encircled the dead body and they knew that application of any force could create law and order problem for it seemed a disturbing situation for all the sections of people present there. Hence the whole Government machinery came into motion. Leaders of both the communities, the officers of the Police department and administration arrived and it was due to the strenuous efforts of Tika Lal Tapiloo and A. N. Vaishnavi that an F.I.R. was registered against the criminal policeman and the postmortem of the dead body was done by a team of doctors independently at the Jawhar Lal

Nehru Hospital, Rainawari, Srinagar. The national and the local press highlighted the matter and the facts reached the Parliament and the State Assembly, both of these were holding Winter Sessions of the year 1988, at that time.

It was our bad luck that the things in the area changed next morning just after the congregation of the morning prayers were held in the local mosque. The members of the majority community came out on the roads and shouted anti government slogans, pelted stones at the transport buses and disrupted the traffic movement in the area against, as they put it, the illegal arrest of the 'Militant', Policeman.

Thus, the story of the first victim at the hands of a religious fanatic and an employee of the State Police, ended. The dead body was cremated at his native village Gairoo (Noor Pora). The mourning was held at both the places i.e., Vicharnag and Gairoio. The only difference that one could feel was that it was a hush-hush mourning held at Vicharnag while as the mourning held at Gairoo was jointly held by all the communities, Hindus and Muslims, for a couple of days till the verdict of the religious fanaticism reached the masses of the village on the next Friday noon.

Thus the era of stress and strain from all quarters started for all the members of a peace loving minority community of the valley which ultimately developed and intensified resulting in the exodus of the whole minority community from the valley. Thus the sad story of the first victim of brutal assassination of a respectable Kashmiri Pandit at the hands of a religious fanatic and fundamentalist, who was also an employee of the State Police Force, came to an end

The devotees and the children of Pandit Ji celebrate the Jayanti and the Nirvan days of this peace loving soul of the valley at his Anand Nagar, Kot, Bhalwal Ashram at Jammu on the first day of the dark fifteenth day of Magha and on the fifteenth day of the dark half of the month of Marghasheersha, every year, respectively.

Shri Shirya Bhat

The Saviour of Hindu Legacy

9. Shri Shriya Bhat

The Saviour of Hindu Legacy During Medieval Kashmir

Sultan Zain-ul-Abiden, Badshah (1420 -1470 A.D.) ascended the throne of Kashmir second time in the year 1420 when the whole valley was almost cleansed of the Hindu populace due to the continuous tyrannical behaviour and repression by the earlier Sultans. The atrocities on the local Hindu populace attained its climax during the reign of Sultan Sikandar (1389-1413 A.D.) commonly known to the people of Kashmir as Skinder But Shikan. He died at the prime of his age and was succeeded by his son Noor Khan under the title of Sultan Ali Shah (1413 – 1419 A.D). Ali Shah proved to be a very week Sultan who easily believed his cunning courtiers and could not differentiate between his friends and foes. There was chaos everywhere. The savage royal soldiers discharged their duties carelessly and the women folk of the valley was, for the first time, brought on the streets in the absence of any rule of law. The king listened to the woes of the people but took no action. He watched everything as a mute and dumb spectator. All the sections of the society were fed-up with the weak nature of the king. The royal palace was a house of intrigues. Being fed-up with his life, Ali Shah desired to proceed on a pilgrimage to Mecca in spite of the stiff disapproval to this plan of the Sultan by his younger brother, Shahi Khan, whom Sultan Skinder, his father, had already proclaimed as the future king of Kashmir, under the title of Zain-ul-Abiden. When Ali Shah insisted on going on to the pilgrimage, he handed over the throne to Zain-ul-Abiden, (Shahi Khan) his younger brother in May - June 1419. After taking such a drastic step he (Ali Shah) reached Jammu, where his in-laws lived, and on the advice of his father-in-law, he abandoned the idea of his pilgrimage and came back to Kashmir with a considerable army given to him by the kings of Jammu and Siyalkot. Zain-ul-Abiden (Shahi Khan), his younger brother, was pleased to see him back in the valley but the alien army of the opponents that he had brought in along with him, gave a strong jolt, both to the local population and to the young prince, who was just seventeen years old then. Shahi Khan, smelling foul play, relinquished the royal throne for his brother Ali Shah and he himself sneaked into the territory of Jasrath, the stronghold of the Chief of the Khokhar tribe. Ali Shah, in pursuit of his fleeing brother, invaded the Khokhar tribe a community of ferocious and dangerous warriors and tribal people living in forests who allowed him and his alien army to penetrate deep into the Pirpanchal forests without any encounter. They gave a blow to the royal army at a selected place taking the royal soldiers unawares and thus ended the reign of Ali Shah as the Sultan of Kashmir and Zain-ul-Abiden returned to the valley as the king of Kashmir second time in 1420. Jonraja has recorded that the people rejoiced as all the doubts from their minds were washed away on the coronation of the King a second time [1]

Some historians are of the view that Sultan Skinder had gifted his talented son Shahi Khan (fourth son) to Timur along with huge presents when the latter had invaded and plundered the whole of the northern sub-continent including Delhi and some parts of the present day U.P. and Himachal. Timur, besides aiming at plundering the wealth of India, wanted to achieve the title of Mujahid after subduing, enslaving or annihilating the infidels all over the sub-continent. This job had already been taken up in hand by the Kashmir Sultans and thus he had a very soft corner for them. Timur did not spare even the Muslim Sultans of the Punjab, Kangrah, and Delhi who apposed his inhuman behaviour. So to tread on the safer path, Sultan Skinder appreciated the move of Timur on his first arrival when the latter was constructing a bridge on the river Sindh for his further march towards Delhi. The messengers of the Kashmir Sultan greeted Timur and in return he sent them back to the valley with valuable presents and with the message that the Sultan may present himself before him (Timur) and offer him his presents on the eve of his return to Samarqand after invading India. It is recorded that Timur invaded Kangrah on 16-1-1399 (when Sikander was the Sultan of Kashmir) and from there he retreated to Samarqand while laying siege on those Punjab states that had not been touched earlier. Further, a number of historians including Jonraj, who also witnessed the coronation ceremony of the king, are of the opinion that Shahi Khan was just 19 years old on the date of his second coronation in the year 1920 when he became the Sultan of Kashmir assuming the title of Zain-ul-Abiden after the death of his elder brother Sultan Ali Shah. In this way his date of birth falls some time in the year 1400-01. Therefore, his accompanying with the royal presents meant for Timur of Samarqand that too a year prior to his birth, appears to be historically wrong.

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[1] *Dheenair malyam janasyaho jaatam Raagyo abhishekatah* *I*
Prataapo vairinaam shaants tasminshchatrani vibhrati *II*
Raajatarangini, by *Jonraja*, v. 753.

The first thing that the Sultan took in hand was to establish the rule of law in the land so that the chaotic conditions that had prevailed in its absence could come to an end. Soon after taking the reigns of the kingdom into his hands, a deadly and dangerous boil appeared on the elbow of the Sultan that increased his pain, restlessness and the worries of the courtiers including the subjects. The remedy for such ailments was known to some of the learned Ayurvedic Pandits of Kashmir but continuous repressions of the Kashmiri Brahmins had compelled them to remain cut off from the society that their knowledge of curing or removing the poisonous effects did not reach to the common man due to the Royal fear that considered such Ayurvedic treatments un-Islamic. Jonraja, while lamenting on the appearance of a dangerous boil on the joint of the elbow of the king, felt disturbed at not being able to find a person for curing such an ailments and compares this task equal to getting a fresh flower during the month of Magha in the valley of Kashmir. [1] It was after a great search that the guards of the king located a young man in the forest area of Utpalvana, presently known as Valakuta, very close to the present day Vicharnag that lies in between the present Vicharnag village and Batsapora, who secretly practiced the old system of Ayurveda and was a regular worshipper of the Holy Fire (Agnihotri) and who also knew the Garudi Shastra (a special kind of treatment that could remove the effect of lethal poisons with incantations-recitation of- "Mantras"). "The search of such a physician by the king's guards was like the discovery of untimely greenery found in an oasis in a vast desert [1] ", writes Jonraja.

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[1] *Abaadhishtataraam kashto vishasphotah kadaachana* I
Prakoshtham Bhumipaalasya prajaanaam hridayam cha sah II
Maaghamaaseeva pushpaanaamMlechha praaleyabaadhaya I
Na laabho vishavaidhyanaam deshe asminn bhavat tadaa II
Rajatarangini, by *Jonraja*, vv. 810- 11.

Born on Chaitra Amavasya, some time during the 1st decade of the 15th century, Shriya Bhat agreed to undertake the treatment of the king only when he was granted full protection of life by the king because such acts of treatment were not allowed by the Islamic clerics and amounted to being un-Islamic. He wanted to clarify his position before taking up the treatment which he and his other brethren had given up due to the repressions let loose by the Islamic fundamentalists during the Sultanate rule. In this way the royal informers brought these facts to the knowledge of the king, who like a drowning man wanted to catch even at a straw and got it proclaimed immediately that complete royal protection be granted to the physician in the hope of getting relief from the acute pain. It resulted in a little delay in the treatment of the king. As all other means of treating the boil had proved futile, the healing through this special incantation was his last hope and delaying it was feared by him like a burnt child who dreads fire. The king himself issued the royal decree and granted full protection to the doctor, who was brought to the palace by the soldiers of the king with due honour. Having been satisfied that the Sultan had himself granted him protection, Shriya Bhat eliminated the boil of the king just as an elephant uproots the poisonous trees in the forests and the king felt better and relieved very soon. [2]

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[1] *Yajvaa Gaarudashaastrajyah Shriya Bhatto nripaanugaih* I
Atraan vishadbhiraaphtotha koopo adhvnvairmaraaviva II
Rajatarangini , by *Jonraja*, v. 812.

[2] *Svayam dattaabhayo Raagya praaphtastamudh*[illegible]*udaya* I
Shriyabhatto vishasphotam kareeva vishpaadapam II Ibid. v. 814.

The cure of the boil by the physician Shriya Bhat brought threefold joy to Kashmir during those dark days of Kashmir history. On the one hand it spread the fame of the physician and on the other hand it was an act that brought peace and solace to the king for he was relieved of a perpetual pain and agony. A smile on the face of the king was a sign of relief for the people of the state as a whole because the people of the valley still believed in the doctrine of "*Yatha Raja taha Praja*" -- 'The welfare of the king decides the fortune of his subjects.' [1]

Having been pleased with the treatment of Shriya Bhat, the king wanted to confer all sorts of wealth and state honours on the learned Kashmiri Pandit physician, but he had been bestowed with 'Paramshanti', 'Eternal peace', by the Divine Mother so he would not accept any such material wealth. On the other hand the Sultan felt it below his dignity that the physician would not accept any of his favours and honours when he had worked so laboriously for days and nights to cure his boil without caring for his personal safety and gain. Shriya Bhat could visualize the tempest of thoughts rising in the mind of the Sultan. Before commenting any further and expressing his inner thoughts, he again asked for his personal safety which the king granted readily. Feeling secure, Shriya Bhat begged the king for the redressal of the grievances which his community had against the rule of the Sultans. He said:-

> "Your Majesty should call back the learned Brahmins who have fled away due to the repression of the earlier Sultans and they should be allowed to open their temples and Pathshalas. They should be offered suitable stipend to continue to work in their respective fields of knowledge. They should be allowed to pursue their religious practices as laid down in their scriptures without any fear. There should be no ban on their performance of religious practices like: Tilakam and cremation of their dead. Ban should be imposed on the

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[1] *Tasya keertih sukham raajyah prajaanaam harshasantatih* I
Praarohamstreeni visphote tatra ekasmin vipaatite II
Rajatarangini, by Jonraja. 815

slaughter of cows and sale of beef. The Brahmins should be exempted from payment of Jaziya and it should be levied as a nominal tax for the rest of the Hindu populace. The Pandits who have been converted to Islam by force, should be brought back into the Hindu fold and their parental places and temples etc. should be restored to them" [1]

The king readily agreed to all the demands put forward by the learned Pandit and he observed that all his demands were community based and had nothing to do with his own self or person. The king was astonished to see that there were instances and the people in the past and even in his present regime who sacrificed everything including their kith and kin, religion and community to get a post or royal honour or favour and this feeble Brahman spurned all that for the sake of his kith and kin and community. [2] Pleased with the human nature of the young Brahman, the king bestowed on him the charge of the highest post of Dharmadhikari. [3] It was a decree from the Sultan of Kashmir and there was no alternative but to accept it with grace and gratitude. It was by dint of his sincere efforts and hard work that Shirya Bhat rose to the highest position of eminence during the reign of this great king of Kashmir and it was by his sheer help and sincere intervention that Pandits like Jonraja, Karpoora Bhat, Ruya Bhat and other Hindu officers rose to the eminent positions in the civil and defense administration. Jonraja has confirmed this fact at the outset of his Chronicle clearly mentioning that all this was possible due to the good wishes and the trust that the Sultan had reposed in him (Shriya Bhat).[1]

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[1] .Ibid., vv. 814, 815(fn),816, and 820-21. *Zaina Tarangini*, (Bombay Edition), vv,1046-91 . *Tabaquati Akbari*, III, 436.

[2] *Tushtena bhoobhujaa dattaam yatheshtamaapi sampadam* I
Naikshishta Shriya Bhattah sa yataatmeva varaanganaam II
Rajataranagini, by *Jonraja*, v. 816

[3] Sultan *Zain-ul-Abnidine* appointed *Shriya Bhat* on the post of *Dharmaadhikaari*. It was one of the highest posts imparting and administratng justice. This post was actually created by King *Jayapida*, also known as *Jayasinha* (751-82 A.D.). He was the grand son of *Laltaditya Mukhapeeda*, who had for the first time created this post for imparting and administrating justice in his vast kingdom.

Rajatarangini by *Kalhana*, book iv , v. 588

Zain-ul-Abiden continued as the Sultan of Kashmir till 1470 (A.D.) and Jonraja has given a lucid account of his reign up to the year 1459 (perhaps due to the untimely demise of the Chronicler), the remaining years of the Sultan's reign from 1459 to 1470 (11 years) have been compiled by Shrivara and he has named his Chronicle as Zaina Charita. Shrivara has himself confirmed that as a disciple of Jonraja he started his account from the episode that was left incomplete by his Guru.[2]

The Rajatarangini of Jonraja is extended over 976 verses. It appears that the untimely death of Shriya Bhat had disheartened the poet so much that he could only add seven more verses to his Chronicle after his death.[3] From the concluding verses of this book it is revealed that the death of Mohammad Khan, the elder son of Zain-ul-Abiden and Thakkur Mahim Shri had preceded the death of Shriya Bhat and the loss of all these pillars of the then Sultanate must have given a great blow to Jonraja, particularly the Sultan. It appears that the tender heart of the poet has not been able to bear these losses that had occurred in quick succession and such occurrences must have proved fatal for Jonraja. The later period of the Sultan appears to have been not too smooth so much so that the Chronicler (Shrivara) has not made even a mention of any of the luminaries that had made Zain-ul-Abiden, the most famous and the greatest Sultan of Kashmir. The death of Jonraja, the great son of the valley, took place on the fifteenth day of the dark half of Kartika (Amavasya), in 1459 A.D at a considerably young age when he had hardly attained the sixth decade of his age. The anniversary and the Jayanti of this great doyen of medieval Kashmir is celebrated by all the Hindu gentry of Kashmir on the fifteenth day of the dark half of Kartika and on the fifteenth day of the dark half of Chaitra (the concluding day of the Vikram era), respectively, every year.

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[1] *Shri Zain-ul-Abadene kshmam sampratyakshti rakshati I*
Jonarahajaabhidhasteshaam udyato vritavarnane II
Sarva Dharmaadhikaareshu niyuktasay dayavatah I
Mukhaat Shri Shirya Bhattasay praapyagyaam anavagyaya II
Raajatarangini by *Jonraja, v.v., 7, 11.*

[2] *Shasasya Jonarajasya so aham Shrivara Panditah I*
Raajaavalee grantha sheshaapurnam kartum udhyutah II
Zaina Charita, by Shrivara, I, v. 7.

[3] *Ragyo Dharamaadhikaaresho pratyvekshaapara sadaa I*
Mahaa Shri Shirya Bhattopi tasmin kale divam yayau II
Rajatarangini by *Jonraja*. v., 970.

There is a Mohalla in the down town of the Srinagar city known as Sheri Bhat, close to Zadibal, the stronghold of the Ahal-i-Tashai population in the city. This Mohalla is on the main road leading from Srinagar to Ganderbal that passes through the interior of the main city. In the main market of this Mohalla, there existed till the date of the exodus of the Hindus from the valley of Kashmir in the year 1990, a shop with a vermillion paste on its board shutters, that was known to the local residents as "Sheri Bhattun Vaan". This shop was owned by a person from the "Attar" family reported to be direct descendent from the clan of this great luminary of Kashmir, Shriya Bhat, on whose name this whole Mohalla is known by the name of "She'ri' Bhat.

Shriya Bhat is said to have preferred seclusion from the worldly comforts and he is also reported to have been a celibate. In fact he was invited by the Sultan when he was in his teens and his loyalty to the Sultan in word and spirit, got him absorbed in the management of the Government and he proved to be the force behind the upliftment of his community and he worked with such a zeal and zest that all other pleasures of life appeared meaningless to him before such a great cause. The royal favour had given him a good chance to achieve proficiency in Ayurveda and Unani systems of medicine in the company of learned teachers and physicians, his research oriented nature had enabled him to concentrate more and more on the research of herbs and "Garudi Shastra' for the treatment of poisonous boils and snake bites, etc, than to be got absorbed in the worldly amusements .

The earlier family details of this great son of the land are not known fully but it is confirmed that he had one elder cousin who had left the responsibility of bringing up his orphan grandson to Shriya Bhat. He brought up the child under his care and after the latter's death he became the head of this family. Paramanand Attar also known as Para Kakh (c. 1820-1920) is reported to be the fourth generation descendent of this family. He lived at Vicharnag in the ancestral house and looked after the grocery and the local medicine-shop at Mohalla She'r'i Bhat. Paramanand enjoyed a commendable position in the society and he was bestowed with a team of four sons and seven daughters during the course of his long married life. But as the bad luck would have it, all his children proved short lived. Disgusted, Paramanand went to a godly person named Vishna Ram who had his hermitage at the Mokhta Moolak Nag presently known as Mo'khta' Po'khe'r which is just close to the present Vicharnag shrine and unfolded before him his family story and the tale of his misfortune. Mahatma Vishna Ram was moved by the sad account of his misfortune and he asked him to construct a temple at the Vicharnag Shrine to ward off his misfortunes. The Attar took the words of the hermit lightly till all his four sons and five daughters passed away one after the other at a very young age. One day the last but one of the children, the sixth daughter had attended the shrine of the temple deity at Vicharnag where she slipped and was drowned in the pond known as "Nagabal". This gave a blow to the unfortunate father and he constructed a Devri stone temple at Vicharnag and thus his last (seventh) daughter, named "Deda Kuji" is reported to have survived after this episode.

Paramanand married his last daughter and the only surviving issue of his erstwhile large family, namely Deda Kuji, to one Sh. Amar Nath who lived at Nowshera close to Vicharnag for he wanted to keep his last child under his close watch at the fag end of his life. At her in-law's house, Deda Kuji gave birth to a son and the moment was celebrated jubilantly by both the families. But the misfortune was waiting just at the corner because soon after Amar Nath Noveshari got seriously ill and he lost his mental balance and he died after some time. There was no body at the in-laws house to look after the widowed mother and the child. The widow had no alternative but to return to the house of her father. Parmananda also shouldered the responsibility whole-heartedly by adopting the son of his daughter as the next heir to all his property that comprised besides land and housing complexes, other household things including the shop run by him at Mohalla Sheri Bhat, Zadibal, Srinagar. Till recently a grocery- shop was run by Shri Hirday Nath, Navsheri, the son of late Amar Nath Novsheri whom Paramand Attar had adopted after the untimely death of his father.[1]

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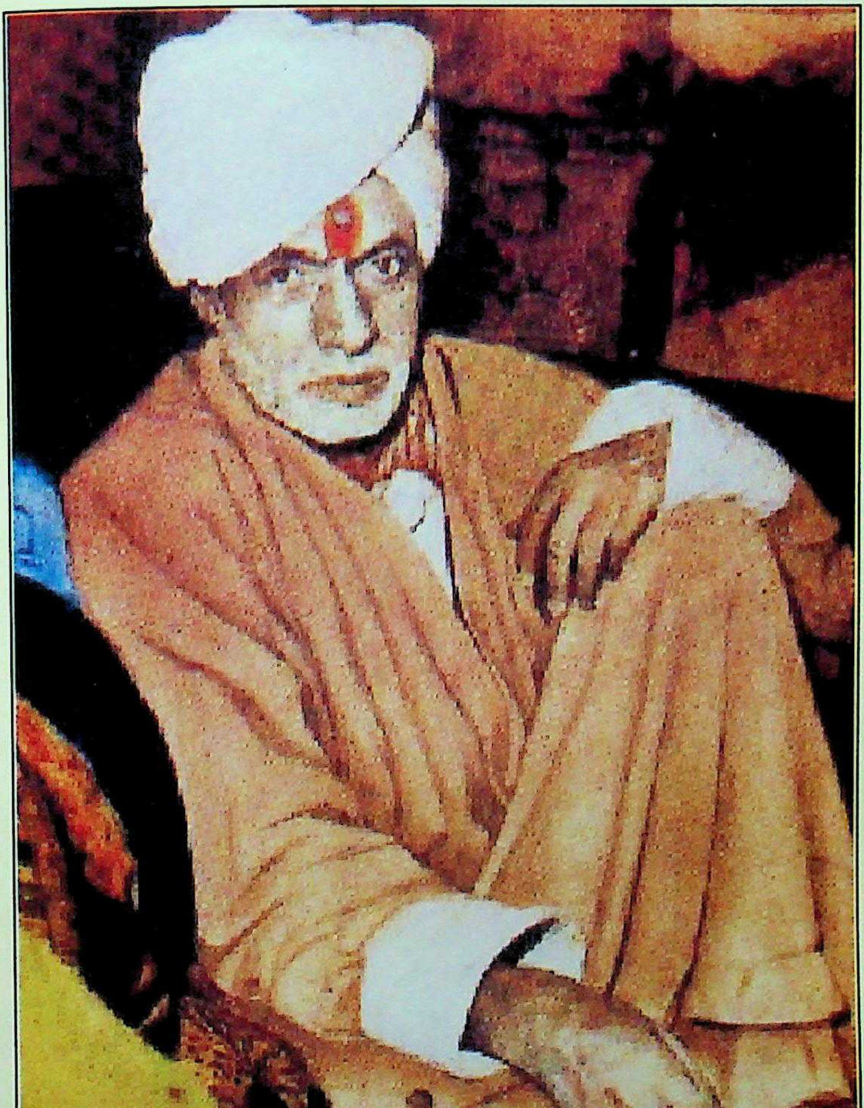
[1] The case history of the family was narrated to the author by *Hirday Nath Novesheri* of *Vicharnag, Srinagar*, Kashmir ,who after the exodus from the valley in 1990, is living at *Lower Roop Nagar, Muthi Road, Jammu.*



JAGAT GURU BHAGWAN GOPINATH JI

10. JAGAT GARU

BHAGWAN GOPINATH JI

The Treaties of Lahore and Amritsar signed on March, 9, and 16, 1846 created a stable State of Jammu and Kashmir for the Dogra rulers with peaceful and loyal masses as their subjects. Among them Maharaja Pratap Singh (1885-1925), was generous enough to share the prosperity of the State with his subjects by way of curtailing to a major extent the revenue and other taxes on common peasants and artisans. The light of literacy reached the common man and schools and colleges came into existence with the royal patronage. The industries of the state touched new horizons and prosperity prevailed in every part of the State. Thus, a sense of contentment helped him to establish the rule of law essential for the progress and prosperity. It was virtually after a gap of more than three centuries that the observance of religious practices and attainment of spirituality prevailed once again in the State of Jammu and Kashmir, worthy of the land of seers and saints.

It is said that calm, quite and serene atmosphere is to our mind what sleep is to our body. Sleep is possible when our bellies are full and we feel contented. In this way our mind is fresh and our body feels the presence of a new vigour. Quietness can be categorized either as the inner one or as the outer one. The former dominates the latter because the latter can be physically achieved. One can close the doors and windows of the room and thus can create calm and silence but such is not the case for the attainment of inner calmness or silence. It is a Yogic practice of a very high order that require purity of thought and mind, This type of purity can not be achieved by way of applying water and any soap/cleanser as we do in case of purifying the parts of our body. The clarity of thought and truthfulness work as water and cleanser to remove the dirt and stagnation of our inner mind and it invokes God Realization provided we are alive to the situation and are physically contented and belong to a society having a sound economy.

In this society of contentment and sound economy, Jagat Guru Bhagwan Gopinath Ji was born on Friday, 19th Ashada, 1955, (Vikrami) – July 3, 1898 (A.D.) in the family of Naran Joo Bhan (of the Raja Bhoota Laugakshi Gotra) at Bhanamohalla, Srinagar. His grand father Lakshman Joo Bhan was a high profile Government Officer of his times and Naran Joo was a famous Pashmina wool merchant. His mother Hara Mali was the only daughter of Prasad Joo Parimoo, popularly known as Zada Bharat, who was a devotee of Mother Goddess Rajnya. Prasad Joo Parimoo being childless for a considerable part of his life got a girl child as a boon from the Mother in the late years of his life and he named her, 'Hara' Ma'li'. Mr.Parimoo was a close disciple of Swami Anand Ji, (c.1860–1954 A.D.), the worthy son of Tota Ram Sazowul of Ganpathyar, who spent the later part of his life at Jamnagri, Shopian. Often Satsang Mandalis were held at the house of Tota Ram at Ganpathyar and Bhagwan Ji would attend these Bajan Mandalis invariably even during the days of his early schooling. In this way Bhagwan Ji inherited the highest spiritual order that the two families of the Parimoos and the Bhans had maintained for centuries.

Narayan Joo Bhan had to surrender all his ancestral property including his parental house at Bhana Mohalla so as to please his step mother when Bhagwan Ji was just ten years' old. In this way the family consisting of Bhagwan Ji and his parents, two brothers and two sisters had no alternative but to change their places of rented residences more often and in this way they resided in a number of Mohallas within the limits of Srinagar city during the days of this wandering imposed on them by his step grandmother. Bhagwan Ji was deprived of parental affection one after the other within a period of nearly two decades during this period of wandering.

Bhagwan Ji completed his formal education up to the Middle Standard and thus acquired a sound knowledge of Persian and Urdu languages and elementary knowledge of English language, taught in the state-run schools in those days.

He also attended the local Pathshala, where he, with his own strenuous efforts, acquired a good knowledge of reading and writing Sanskrit language in both Devanagari and Sharada scripts. Thus he simultaneously acquired a sound knowledge of Sharada, Devanagari, English and Nastaliq scripts. Bhagwan Ji was fond of attending discourses and discussions on various Upanishadic tenets and the Shaivite philosophy of Kashmir and would visit various such centers and organizations for taking part in such discussions. He recited from a number of religious scriptures on such occasions, which, it appears, he had memorised from his very child-hood.

At a very young age of 16, Bhagwan ji headed various groups of his Balak Mandalis for various religious celebrations and social work at various Asthapans on the days of yearly congregations held at a number of such places. Whether it was clearing or de-silting of some of the holy springs at Mata Ksheer Bhawani, Pokharibal, Hari Parbat, Vicharnag, or any other job connected with such assemblies, he would gladly participate in such public service works. His expeditions on the day of annual pilgrimages to Hara'mokh, Mahadeva, Gangabala on Gangaa Ashtamii, Amarnath Ji, ,Martand, and Jwalaji Parbat at Khrew, were a routine with him. Besides heading for such long expeditions of religious importance, he would earnestly and secretly meet the seers and saints who lived in all those far flung areas of the state without sharing such experience with his other companions.

Employment in a job or a trade is considered to be the main source of earning bread for every young man and it plays an important part in maintaining a family and it also binds the individual with the society. Now that Bhagwan Ji was devoid of all such attachments, he tried to remain away from the commitment of any employment. No doubt, family pressures at the initial stage compelled him to take up some short time jobs. Detachment from the family and from the ancestral home compelled him to help his maternal uncle in the Pashmina shawl business only for a few years. To pay back the debt of some previous births, as Bhagwan ji put it himself, he worked at the Vishnath Art Press Srinagar for a few years and once he visualized that the establishment had flourished, he separated himself from it and started an independent small grocery shop at Sekidafar, Srinagar. Thus, with the establishment of an independent business, he was free to go into a deep trance type state to which he had been initiated by his Guru to proceed further in the field of his spiritual attainment. He continued such practices for a period of ten years during his job hunting, but actually he remained engrossed in different modes of meditation during all this period.

During the period of Bhagwan Ji's stay at Ranga Teng, Rainawari he withdrew from almost all the matters concerning the family that looked after him and was completely engrossed in spirituality till he attained the age of 39 years. He remained always in deep meditation and he further curtailed his occasional and very less conversations that he seldom entered into at the time of certain special emergencies. He kept the aim of his life confined to three golden rules: 1, Simplicity in his behaviour, 2. Truthfulness in his deeds and ideas, and 3, Purity of mind and action. The period of nearly seven years that he spent at the house of Tikalal Ji of Ranga Teng, Rainawari, are considered to be of utmost importance when he acquired the higher spiritual accomplishments. This period of transition and slumber is considered as a period of "Do or Die" in the path of Sadhana. It is the state when the Sadhak renounces all his outer connections and tries to enter deeper and deeper into his inner self. The duality between his own self and God vanishes and the mist of separation or apartness from Him comes to an end. This state is known as Paramananda Awastha and Bhagwan Ji attained this highest state when he was looked after by Nila Koul Saraf of Dal-hassan Yar, Srinagar, who was his most sincere devotee.

The reserved and most silent attitude of Bhanwan Ji was enough to attract hoards of devotees that thronged to his Ashram or the place of his residence though he himself had never indulged in any act of preaching or teaching. His most common benedictions were either to admit the devotee by the touch of his tongs or offer him a pinch of ashes from his Dhooni that always remained alive all the 24 hours.

In his personal life, Bhagwan Ji was not fond of taking daily baths yet his body emitted the fragrance of divinity. He was very fond of washing his limbs, face and Yajnyopavita daily very early in the morning after which he would proceed to his seat. Putting on his white heavy turban, he would put a Saffron Tilak on his forehead with an inner lining of the ashes from his Dhooni that we see in the photographs so much revered and adored in almost all the houses where the Kashmiri Pandits and his devotees live. In all the photographs of Bhagwan ji, one thing is common and that is the dazzling light in his eyes that continues to change form and intensity if one watches them constantly and with devotion.

The valley of Kashmir is considered to be the abode of saints and Rishis and it attained the name of Reshi Va'r, 'the garden of Rishis'. Among all those luminaries who have entered the realms of Rishi/Saint-hood, Bhagwan Gopinath ji is the single personality who attained the honoured title of Bhagwan (God Himself) during his life time. Though he never went out side the valley all his life but his divinity is invariably felt at a number of sacred places of the valley on all auspicious occasions regularly. The main among them are:

1. The Sharika Peetha at Hari Parbat,Pokharibal,
2. The Shakti Peetha of Mata Rajnya at Tulamula,
3. The Shakti Peetha of Jwala ji at Khrew,
4. The Shakti Peetha of Bhadrakali at Handwara,
5. The Shakti Peetha of Jyeshtha Bhagwati at Srinagar,
6. The Gyan Peetha at Gupta Ganga, Srinagar,
7. The Bhairava Peetha of Tushkara Raja at Narsingh Grah, Srinagar, and,
8. The Shiva Peetha at Amarnath Ji Cave, Kashmir.

On 29th May 1968, the second day of the bright fortnight of Jyeshtha, Bhagwan Ji got up as usual from his Asana and after his daily routine he occupied his Asana, tied his turban and marked his forehead with the usual Tilakam. He blessed all the devotees who had arrived for his Darshana. In the after-noon he paid Re 1/- to each of the three Sadhus as Dakshina, who had come to meet him. In the meantime one of the devotees requested Bhagwan Ji to have a cup of tea

(Qahwa) which he declined to take saying "Hence forth I shall not take any tea." He remained in complete Samadhi till 5.45 p.m. He was served with a glass of juice when he regained consciousness. Soon a dazzling light sparkled from the eyes of Bhagwan Ji and emitting a flashing sparkle from his left eye, Bhagwan Ji left his mortal remains while reciting the Maha Mantra of "*Om Namah Shivayi*". His cremation took place the next day and it was attended by the whole gentry of the valley, big and small. Most popular saint of Kashmir, Swami Nand Lal Ji got arranged flowers to be strewn on the road of the last journey of this great soul. Actually he had come to the Ashram of Bhawan Ji four/ five days earlier and spoken aloud in his sleep that an earth quake was going to take place. Pointing towards Bhagwaj Ji he had asked him as to why he had over burdened his fragile shoulders. The devotees knew it to be a mystic conversation. Bhagwan Gopinath Ji is the only saint of the valley in whose honour a Postal Stamp of Rs.3/- denomination was issued by the Government of India on 26th July, 1997 on his 100th birth anniversary i.e., just after 29 years of leaving his mortal remains.

Things that Bhagwan Ji always kept with his own self comprised:

1. A set of books, like Shrimad Bgagwad Gita, the Panchastavi, the Mahimnastotra, Guru Gita and a set of two 'Omkars' in a rectangular shape written in his own hand, one in Sharada script and the other in Devanagri. The boarders of the latter one are decorated with "Ram, Ram" and that of the former one with "Shiva Shiva,"
2. The Iron brazier that served as Dhooni,
3. The Iron tongs,
4. A pot (Tumba) of Bronze in which he prepared tea and a bronze cup, (Kho's), and
5. Some papers in his own hand writing.

The miracles attributed to Bgagwan Ji are count-less and have been recounted in a number of books and articles that have been published by Bhagwan Gopi Nath Ji Trust, Srinagar/Jammu by a number of devotees from time to time. Here I would like to relate my own experience with Bhagwan

Gopi Nath Ji on a very chilly cold night of January, 1951, when I was a child of hardly ten years of age. I had been fortunate enough to spend a night at the lotus feet of Bhagwan Ji by chance at the house of one of his devotees at village Hal presently falling in the District of Shopian, Kashmir.

From his very adolescence, my father, who himself was a perfect Karmakandi, Jotshi and devoted to Mother Goddess Durga, wanted that I should grasp the basic knowledge of Sanskrit language besides the school education of general nature. For this purpose he introduced me to the study of *Amar Kosha* (a Dictionary of synonyms in Sanskrit language), Panchastavi, and Kaumadi. A student who was introduced to all this extra learning had to cram the verses from these scriptures so that I could chant them fluently without going into the meanings of the words at the initial stage. It was in the year 1950 that my uncle from my fathers side (Poopha), Mr. N .N. Razdan, of Pinglina, Pulwama, was appointed as a Special Line Teacher in the Education Department at the then Government Middle School Hal (Shopian) in the year, 1951. It was his first appointment and place of posting. Mr. Razdan was well versed in the modern methodology of school education besides being a good scholar of Hindi/Sanskrit languages. Since the schools were closed for the winter break, I was asked by my father to spend my winter vacation at Pinglina so that I could continue my study of scriptures and the school home-work under the guidance of Mr. Razdan. In this way the first session of my so called private tuition started at Pinglina in December, 1950, when I was a student of the Fifth Primary class.

Every thing moved as per the plan worked out by my elders. My early morning session started with cramming of the couplets from the scriptures under the directions and guidance of my tutor and the day was meant for other general studies and school home work etc. One fine morning in the month of January, 1951, Mr. Razdan received a massage from his school Head Master to attend the school for some immediate official work. It had been snowing continuously since midnight and a thick layer of snow had already accumulated on the ground around and it was still snowing. The means of transport were scanty during those days and the bad weather had further worsened the situation. The duty bound Mr. Razdan, started making preparations to leave for Hal so that he could attend his duties as early as possible next day. The only hope was a passenger bus from K.M.D.A.(Kashmir Motor Drivers Association) scheduled to leave Srinagar Bus Stand at 9.30 a.m. for Shopian that would reach Pinglina at about 11 a.m. approximately. The old mother of Mr. Razdan did not favour his long journey and she also insisted that the weather was not favourable for the bus service to run on schedule. After a great discussion between the mother and the son, it was agreed that I too should accompany Mr.Razdan to the school for the consolation of his mother.

With all our preparations to make perfect our unwanted journey, we came out on the main road leading to Shopian next morning and reaching here, we got a Tonga to carry us to Pulwama, the then Tehsil headquarters. This, as informed by Mr. Razdan, was to avoid the over-loaded bus reaching the Tehsil headquarters and to get information of the condition of the road from Pulwama onwards. It was a difficult walk from the Tonga stand up to the bus-stand through overwhelmingly dirty and muddy road and the continuous snowing had made the things uglier. The bus-stand was just a ditch of mud and there were few passengers and a few employees at the closed ticket counter in the absence of any service vehicles. Mr. Razdan was informed by the Manager of the stand that as per the telephonic massage, the passenger bus from Srinagar to Shopian had left at the scheduled time and would be allowed to proceed further in case the weather conditions continued to be favourable. After a short while the bus packed with passengers and luggage arrived and got emptied to a great extent at the Pulwama bus-stand. But the number of the fresh passengers for the onward journey was not small. This prompted the driver to complete the formalities at the bus stand speedily and continue the onward journey on the clear warning to the passengers that the bus fare would be valid only up to the place as would be allowed by the favourable condition of the road. Anyway the bus started its journey towards Shopian and Mr. Razdan got a seat in the bus while I kept standing. The farther our vehicle moved, the thicker was the layer of snow on both sides of the road. In this atmosphere of 'stop' and 'go', the bus touched the outskirts of some village and the conductor asked Mr. Razdan that the bus had reached close to the Govt. School, Hal. Leaving the bus, we proceeded towards an elevated but beautifully laid out place with a school sign board and observing our arrival, the school peon opened the office room fitted with an iron fire stove and informed the Head Master about our arrival. After warming himself for a short while, Mr. Razdan went to the table where the Head Master was doing something with the files and papers. Soon both of them were busy with the official work and I kept warming myself in front of the stove, a luxury for the kids of small schools in those days.

After a great deal of discussions and by continuous working for at least four hours, the school business of the day came to an end and the Head Master and Mr. Razdan closed the record files and moved out of the room. It was a little darker now and fresh snowing had made the area completely white now. The gap between the thick layers of snow that served as a foot path in the morning was no more visible. Our shoes sank into the fresh snow as we walked till we reached on the road side. After a brief departure conversation, the Head Master left for his home situated at a short distance from the school. Mr Razdan and I proceeded towards a road side shop in order to protect ourselves from the falling snow and to enquire about the availability of the return transport. At the shop, the shopkeeper and the other people present confirmed that the last bus service from Shopian to Srinagar had already left the station for Pulwama/ Srinagar. Thus there was no alternative but to spend the night at the rented accommodation where Mr. Razdan lived during the normal days of schooling.

The place was at a short distance from the road and while proceeding towards it we crossed a small stream. On the other side of the stream was the shop of a Kashmiri Pandit who greeted Master ji warmly. The shop sold general grocery items and seemed to be a flourishing enterprise. Master ji paid his respects to Mr. Dama Kakh, the owner of the shop who was an elderly person with a big and white turban decorating his skull with a glittering forehead and he was seated on a neatly covered platform. While we were leaving for our residence, he invited both of us to dinner on the same evening informing that a special guest from Srinagar was arriving at his house that very evening. In reply the Master Ji thanked him saying, "*Chaloo yeh pareshani bhi door ho gai*".

At the residence I kindled some charcoals in a firepot after changing our drenched clothes. Master Ji was neither fond of Kangri nor had he any liking for tea etc., for both these things involved manual labour. This fact had been brought to my notice by his mother before our departure from Pinglina. So the first thing I did was to bring a bucket of water from the nearby stream. Next I asked Master Ji to light the stove so that I could prepare a cup of tea for both of us because his mother had kept a few loves of bread in the bag that comprised our luggage. While taking tea I enquired about the Pandit shopkeeper and Master Ji gave me his name as Pandit Damoodhar Khan, a wholesale/retail merchant of grocery and cloth in the whole area. He also informed me that his son Triloki Nath Khan was a student of his school at Hal. It was for the first time that I heard that the Pandits of Kashmir have also "Khan" as their surname/sub cast.

Soon after we heard a knock at the door and Triloki and his servant were at the door with a lantern to lead us to their house. Here Triloki was introduced to me by his school teacher. Now it was snowing very heavily and on reaching the residence of Pandit Damoodar, the boy led Master Ji to an old type but well decorated audience hall (Devan Khana') where a man wearing a big white turban was sitting in one of the corners of the room with his head supported on a pillow in a sleeping posture. A few elderly people were sitting silently in front of the man. Master JI paid his reverence to the saintly man while I, on the advice of my new friend Triloki, bowed and prostrated myself before him and I was helped by Dama Kakh to get up and take my seat close to Master Ji. Soon tea came in a Samawar that was served in bronze cups to the people present there. Though Master Ji hesitated for having taken tea at his residence but Dama Kakh insisted that he should take it as 'Naived' from 'Bab Ji.' This prompted Master Ji to ask from his disciple Mr. Triloki Nath to reveal a few details regarding 'Bab Ji' who was reclining in the corner and occasionally puffing either from his 'Chilam' or from the pipe of the Hukah that was prepared and placed before him by Pandit Damudhar Ji. The boy told Master Ji that 'Bab Ji ' was a highly revered person who had arrived there from Srinagar that day just before it was dark. Later Mr. Damoodhar Khan revealed to Master Ji that the revered person was Bhagwan Gopinath Ji Maharaj from Srinagar whom they used to call Bhagwan Ji or Bab Ji.

It was still snowing out side and Bab Ji would open his eyes after long intervals to ask Pandit Damoodhar about the weather conditions prevailing out side and after getting the undesirable answer he would again close his eyes and go into a trance. The position on the other hand was quite contrary to this. It was now late in the night and that too during the chilly winter season. Some of the guests including small children in the family felt sleepy before taking any dinner. The local youngsters were now anxious to return to their homes as it was a winter night and the time was 10.30.p.m. But Bub Ji was in deep Dhyana and he hardly cared for such petty things. At 10.45.p m. Bhagwan Ji asked Damoodhar Ji to keep a lot of hot water ready as more guests were just arriving. Every body in the hall including Pandit Damoodhar was astonished to hear such words from the saint. But nobody would ask further questions. The order was carried out and the process for heating the water in a big container was taken up immediately. A kind of sweet disturbance prevailed in the house during that moment which subsided after a few minutes. Half an hour before mid night there was a knock on the main gate of the house and Bhagwan Ji asked Pandit Damoodhar to get the door opened for the guests. The fresh arrival consisted of six persons who bowed low before Bab Ji and informed him humbly that their motor car had broken down due to the heavy snowing and it was after great difficulty that they had reached the place on foot. They had some musical instruments with them and immediately Kangris were arranged for them. Bhagwan ji directed them to change and wash their hands and feet with hot water. Soon a Samawar of Qahwa was arranged for the guests and immediately it was followed by the dinner comprising the local fish and rice. Bedding was arranged for all and till then the instruments had dried with the warmth in the room. Thus the Bhajan Mandali started just after 12.30 o'clock and continued till morning. All participated in the Mandali and listened to the Bhajans whole heartedly including the children of the house. This was my first and the last Sakshatkar at the feet of Bhagwan Ji during my childhood. My tender mind experienced this as a glimpse of His Divinity during my early age when, as a small boy, I was unaware of all the niceties of Divinity possessed by such great saints.

The Followers of Bhagwan Ji have established big Ashrams in all the major cities of the country and even out side of it. A great Ashram of the saint also exists at Udhaywala, Jammu where, besides other activities of religiosity, the Jayanti and the Nirvan days of this great saint of the soil are celebrated on the twelfth day of the bright half of Ashada and on the second day of the bright half of Jyashtha every year respectively with great devotion and reverence.

Jotshi Pandit Keshav Bhat

Jotshi Pandit Keshav Bhat

Repository of Kashmir Karma Kanda

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century there lived a luminary, Pandit Sata Ram Bhat, in Rainawari, Srinagar, who, besides being a master Pandit in the pore of rituals, was an astrologer and an expert Karma Kandi, who belonged to a well to do Kashmiri Brahmin family of the Swamin Atri Gotra. He lived at Jogi Langar, (the place of free kitchen for the hermits and Sadhus), on the bank of Ma'r (Mari or Mahori). He headed a large family that comprised his six sons, namely Naran Pandit, Lakshman Pandit, Prasad Joo Pandit, Makund Ram Shastri, Keshav Bhat and Prakash Bhat. All of them were scholars of Sanskrit language, well versed in the Sharada script and efficient astrologers and Karmakandis.[1] Naran Pandit, the first son and Prasad Joo, the third son, though married, were childless so they adopted their younger brothers as their sons as desired by their father. Prakash Bhat, the youngest of all, was adopted by Naran Pandit and Keshav Bhat was adopted by Prasad joo Pandit. Makund Ram Shastri served as the court astrologer of Maharaja Pratap Singh (1885-1925), whereas Keshav Bhat, his younger brother, worked as a Pathshala teacher at Nunar, Tehsil, Gandarbal. The third son, Prasad Bhat, besides being well versed in astrological calculations, was a master in the art of singing. Due to these qualities, he was respected most among all of his brothers by Maharaja Ranbir Singh (1856-85) and Maharaja Pratap singh also respected him when the latter was still a Prince, with the result he had more an easy access to the palace than his brothers. Makund Ram Shastri, as the astrologer of the Maharaja, also published independently a Panchang (Almanac) for the Hindus of Kashmir. Due to the untimely demise of Makund Ram in the year 1921, the astrological calculations were done by Prasad Bhat and the publication of the Panchang continued for only a couple of years after the death of Makund Ram.

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[1] The family history has been recorded from one of the surviving progeny from the Handu clan, namely Shri B.L. Handu of Jogi Langar Rainawari, presently living at lower Roop Nagar, Muthi, Jammu.

The exact date of birth of Pandit Keshav Bhat is not available but it is said that that he was born in the year 1873 at Jogilangar, Rainawari, close to the Gurudwara Chhati Padshahi. He was the Parohit of the Sikh population that resided in the vicinity of this Gurudwara, hence nicknamed a 'Sikh' in his own community. ·In this connection Pandit Prithvi Natth Handu, the grand son of Pandit Lakshman Joo, the elder brother of Prasad joo and the adopted father of Pandit Keshav Bhat, has clarified the reason behind the addition of the surname 'Sikh' to their clan in an interview. According to him (Prithvi Nath Handu) the addition of the word 'Sikh' with the name of their clan was prevalent since the time of their ancestor, Pandit Sata Ram Handu. He related that once Maharaja Ranbir Singh wanted to decorate his Pooja Room with a copy of the Holy Guru Granth Sahab. He ordered Sata Ram Handu, his astrologer, to accomplish this task as early as possible. In the absence of any printing press, availability of such a voluminous book at such a short notice was almost impossible. But the royal orders could not be ignored. To meet the wishes of the Maharaja, Sata Ram begged for an interval of a few weeks and the Maharaja readily agreed. Thus, the learned Pandit separated himself from all family/society engagements to complete the task as early as possible and it took him a six months period to prepare a copy of the Holy Book in his own hand, to be presented to the Maharaja. Sata Ram deputed his messenger to the Maharaja with the request of fixing a date for its presentation as soon as the holy book was ready to be placed in the royal Pooja Room. Instantly, the Maharaja ordered that a royal boat (Paranda) be sent to the house of Sata Ram to bring him to the royal court with full state honours. The decorated boat reached through the waters of the Dal Lake near the house of the learned Pandit of Jogilangar and he also acted immediately without losing any time to obey the royal orders. The Ghat close to his house was packed with inquisitive people including the neighbours that had assembled to witness the occasion. They were unable to recognize their own neighbour due to his extended beard and long hair that had grown on his face and head during all these six month's laborious work. They took him for a 'Sikh' who boarded the royal boat. From that date he and his progeny got the nickname of 'Sikh' and this surname stuck generation after generation.

Jotshi Pandit Keshav Bhat, besides being an experienced Karma Kandi having sound knowledge of different ritualistic practices of Hindu Dharma, particularly in respect of the Kashmiri Pandits, was a good astrologer and an experienced scholar of Sanskrit, Kashmiri, Hindi, Punjabi and English. He was well versed in the Sharada script in which all our books on history, religion and Karma Kanda, etc., were available in those days. Sharada was the most popular script of the masses and we maintained even our daily accounts in our homes and establishments in this very script. Needless to say that some of the graveyard stones of that time bore the names and other details of the dead in this very script. Keshav Bhat was a good and sincere Pathshala teacher by profession and was posted at Nunar, at a distance of 3 Km from Tehsil Ganderbal on the Sonamarg road. He attended his Pathshala at Nunar daily on foot from Rainawari because there were no means of modern transport in those days. In addition to attending his duties he also performed the functions of a priest for his Yajmans. As a regular worshipper of Maha Gayatri, he attended the abode of Rajnya, at a close distance from the place if his posting, preferably on all the auspicious days of the year and edited and corrected almost all his manuscripts in the compound of the temple at Tulamula. He, being a regular "Agniordinari" left his bed early in the morning called "Brahmi Mahoorta" to have ample time for performing the worship of the Holy Fire (Agni Hotra). Besides imparting practical training of ritualistic praxis to some of the boys of his community at his home, he inspired a few of the boys of the Kashmiri Pandits for these practices, while attending to his Yajmani at Srinagar or at the place of his posting.

Pandit Keshav Bhat was a perfect Karma Kandi and he studied almost all the books available on Karma Kanda which the priests of the valley made use of. While making a thorough survey of all the material available with various Brahmin families of the valley he came to the conclusion that the Pandits performed various rites differently in different parts of the valley. He also found that there was no unanimous approach in the performance of these rites and rituals and he also felt that such a state of affairs is sure to jeopardize the function of these rites and rituals as a whole. He took the following steps so that the process is streamlined:

1. All the literature meant for performance of the rituals, besides not being of uniform nature, was written in the Sharada script and because of the changing job and economic scenario, the boys of the Karkun Pandits [1] were neither interested in the performance of any rituals nor in the learning of the Sharada script either at home or at the school/Pathshala level. He also realized that the prospects of both, the Sanskrit language and the Sharada script, were dark and the circumstances were not favourable for its advancement either presently or in the near future.
2. Besides, in the absence of standard ritualistic patterns, the Purohits used different patterns of Pooja as contained in their age old locally hand written books (Pothis) for the performance of a single rite in different regions with the result that a single ritual was performed in different ways in different parts of the valley. So he thought of editing and standardization of Pothis so that the ritualistic performances get uniformity and are performed in a standard form.
3. The learned scholar was sure that such diversity in ritualistic practices was sure to hurt the essence of the ritualistic performances which is the soul of Hindu Dharma that has continued millennium after millennium and kept the torch of Dharma burning from times immemorial in the whole sub-continent.
4. He wanted that before it was too late to take up the standardization of the ritualistic performances, it was necessary to rewrite and edit all the material available with

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[1] Comparatively an affluent class of the Kashmiri Pandits who adopted the new thoughts and privileges that had invaded the whole sub-continent with the advent of the 20th century without even looking back to the odd effects that such a random step might caste on the society as a whole in the coming days.

the Purohits throughout the valley and to give it a uniform shape. For this purpose he visited the length and breadth of the valley including some remote villages. While discussing the issue with this specialized class of the community he examined and made manuscripts of all such materials acceptable to the Parohit class of the valley as a whole and also to the liking of the newly emerged 'Karkun' class of the Kashmiri Pandits in the society. Needless to say that without complaining, he experienced all those difficulties with which a scholar is confronted even today at the time of compiling such research materials more so when the scholar has to keep in view the public opinion and acceptance as well.

5. He worked on the project throughout his life and edited, annotated and revised a number of books on Kashmir rituals that also included Stutis, Stotras, Sahasranams, and Swahakars, extracts from the Vedas, the Puranas, Shruitis and Smritis, the Upnishads, the Bhagwadgita, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. He extracted the material from all these books and transliterated it into the Devanagri script that was now gaining popularity in place of the Sharada script and other local scripts throughout the whole sub-continent. He did all this labour out of his love for this work without getting any kind of remuneration or monetary help from any quarter.
6. He had almost completed the manual work of editing and writing the material thus prepared in the Devanagri script when the facility of printing press had reached to a few metropolitan cities of the sub-continent. He approached one such institution, namely 'Nirmala Sagar Printing Press' 26-28, Kobalt Lane, Bombay in the year 1925 for printing some of the books that he had edited, transliterated and annotated till then.

In the mean time the Printing press reached the valley by the middle of the 20th century and all such material was now got locally printed by Pandit Keshav Bhat at M/S Vishva Nath Art press, Residency Road, Srinagar. Thus the availability of neatly printed books on various aspects of Hindu religion was available at Rainawari, Srinagar and other places of the valley at a very nominal price. The printer had himself marked all his printed material "Paropkarayi Prakashitah" 'printed for the benefit of the people.' This also gave new dimensions to the variegated religious/ritual practices and the Parohit class of the Kashmiri Pandits feel benefited by this material even today after an expiry of more than a century because no such attempt on such a large scale has been repeated by any affluent Brahmin or Karkun of the valley for taking up printing of such material again or improving it further, till today.

The list of books edited and published by Jotshi Pandit Kashav Bhat that have reached to us till date are as under:

1. Nitya Karma Vidhi , Parts I, II, and III.
2. Shiva Pooja,
3. Saundairyi Lahri/ Panchastavi,
4. Karma Kandi, Parts I. and II,
5. Veda Kalpadrum, No: I, and II (especially for Havans, etc.),
6. Mekhala Pustak, (that includes Vivah, Kanya Sanskars, and Eikle Pooja, as well),
7. Shiva Ratri Pooja and Mahimnastotra,
8. Parthishvara Pooja,
9. Bhawani Sahasranam,
10. Kashmir Jotish Sangrah,
11. Vishnu Sahasranam,
12. Ganesh, Rajnya, Jwala, Sharika, Sutatis and Saharanams,
13. Bhakti Vivek Sar – A collection of devotional Songs,
14. Gnesha, Durga Stotrawali and Namawali,
15. Devi Pooja,
16. Tsamana Vakyam, for Shiva Pooja,
17. Stotra Mala : that included Snanvidhi, Sandhyopasana, Naived Mantra, Bhojan vidhi, Panchagavya vidhi, Guru Geeta, Gayatri, and Makundamala , etc.,
18. Samvatsariki Pitri Kriya – Karma Kanda Pustakam,
19. Boha Roopa Garbha as in Shiva Pooja,
20. Vyahriti and Vaishva Deva Pooja as the Nityakarma for Agni-Hotris.

The scholar of repute who revitalized the ritualistic portions of the Hindu Dharma of the valley during the 1st half of the 20th century breathed his last on the second day of the dark half of Ashvin 2006 Vikrimi (1949 A.D.) at Rainawari and in this way a single-man institution of Kashmir astrology, rituals, a great scholar of Sanskrit language and Sharada Script, a preacher and a teacher of the microscopic minority of Kashmir, came to an end.[1] Shri Govind Bhat Shastri, probably known as 'Goyinda Shastri,' of Rainawari, Srinagar was very much impressed by the scholarship of this great luminary and he has composed a few couplets in Hindi in his honour and one couplet among them gives the year of the death of this great son of Kashmir.[2]

The Sanjeevani Sharda Kendra, Anand Nagar Bohri presented the "Sharada Samman" of the year 2007 to Jotshi Keshav Bhat at a colourful function held on 20-9-2007 on the day of the Sharada Ashtami. Pandit Shamboo Nath Bhat, the grand son of Pandit Keshav Bhat, who was invited to attend the function, received the "Sharada Puraskar" from Retired Brig. Suchet Singh, the Chief Guest on the occasion.[3]

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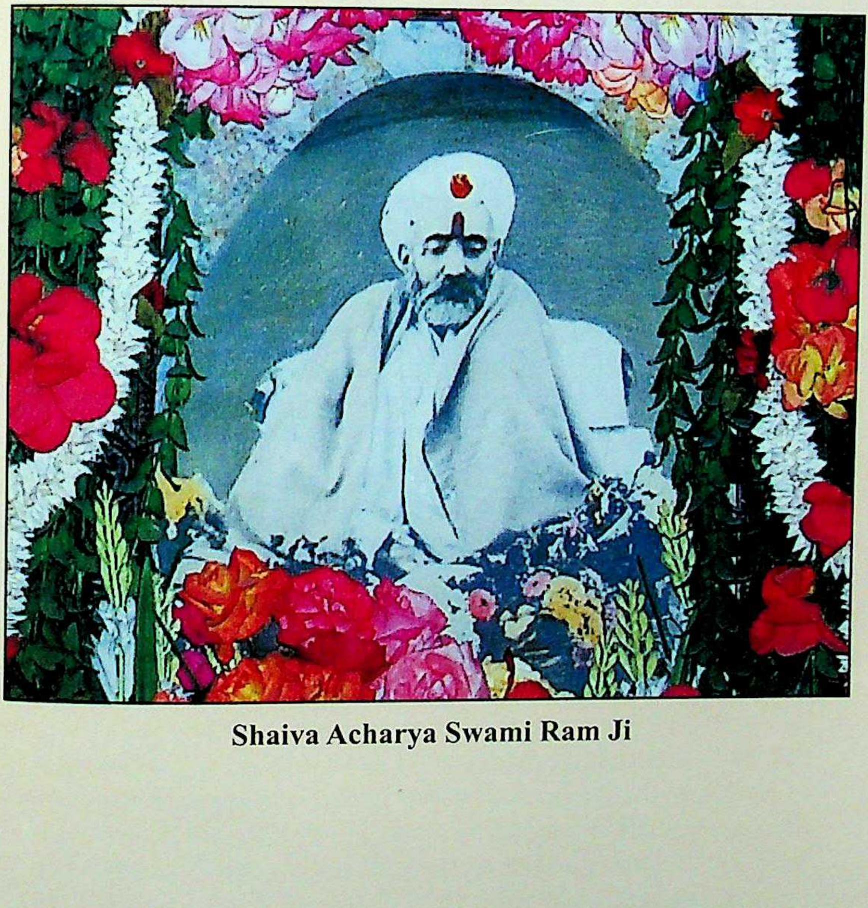
[1] The information contained in this article has the support of:
a). Salikani Kashmir-o-Hind, Sant Mala Pt I and II, July, 1963. by Dilbar Kashmiri,
b). Kashmir Ki Sant Parampara, Publisher, Bhagwan Gopi Nath Trust, Udayvala, Jammu, Ed. By Prof. (Dr.) B.L. Koul, year, 2008.

[2] . Chh adhik dvisahasra main huwa vileen I
Kashmir Ki Sant Parampara by Prof (Dr.) B.L.Koul, year,2008, p.57.

[3] Sharada Puraskar from 2000 – 2008, year 2009 by Prof (Dr.) B.LKoul , p., 47.



Shaiva Acharya Swami Ram Ji

Shaiva Acharya
Swami Ram Ji

Swami Ram was born in a Brahman family of Chinkrala Mohalla, Habbakadal on 13th December, 1853. His father Shukdeva Handu was a well read and honoured Brahmin of his class and was an astrologer of repute. The horoscope prepared at the time of the birth of the child clearly indicated to his father that the child would be a highly spiritual and a saintly person in his life. Pandit Vasudeva Handu, the grand father of the boy, was a great scholar of Karma Kanda, astrology, and Sanskrit language and well versed in Sharada script. He educated the boy in the elementary Sanskrit language at home from his very early age. The boy used to spend much of his leisure time in the company of Pandit Ishwar Sahib, his grand-uncle, who was a Brahamchari and knew different performances in Yoga. The father put the boy under the guidance of Lala Joo Kokru, who lived in his neighbour-hood and who was a teacher of Shaiva philosophy. Next, the boy was put under the guidance of Pandit Mansa Ram Monga of Sheeli'taing, Srinagar, who was popularly known as 'Manakak,' for advanced studies in Shaiva philosophy. From then onwards the boy remained completely absorbed in deep penance.

Seeing that the boy, who was yet only 15 years old, was drifting away from the family bounds, the father married him just to keep him bound to the family. Within a period of three years, Sarasvati Devi, the wife of Swami Ram, gave birth to a son, who was named Krishna. Within a period of one year of Krishna's birth, the fate of Swami Ram Handu took an adverse turn. Death took away all the comforts of the family, his wife Sarasvati Devi and the son both passed away, leaving him shattered and devastated.

From thence onwards Swami Ram became a wanderer from one house to another and from one village to another. In his aimless wandering Sudhama Miskeen, a devotee of Swami Ram, respectfully invited him to his house at Mallapura, Habakadal, Srinagar and requested him to live with him as long as he wished. Swami Ji lived in that house for a period of three years when Narayan Das Raina, popularly known 'Nava Naran', a businessman by profession, approached him and requested him to live in his ancestral house located at Fateh Kadal, Srinagar to which Swami Ji readily agreed.

In fact, Mr Raina had learnt some basic conversation in English from Rev. Doxey, who is the founder of the famous Mission School in Kashmir in 1881. After leaving the school he started a small store to help the European visitors. The business proved fruitful but due to bad luck a fire broke out that razed many shops to the ground including the one run by Mr. Raina. While the shop was not yet totally destroyed in the ghastly fire, Mr. Raina saved some of his store-items by throwing them into a nearby 'Bahatsa', 'a large open boat or a barge' used to transport firewood and rice/flour/Paddy, etc. He tried his best to procure a new shop but that did not materialize. At last he modified this barge into a shop that could sail anywhere and at any time. This floating shop gave a good start to the business of Mr Raina but with the advent of the rainy and the cold seasons all his hopes seemed shattered for all the articles on sale were spoiled due to the water that seeped through the thatched side walls and the temporary roof of the boat. In the mean time, on one fine morning on May 9, 1907, swami Ji was in a happy mood and on seeing Narayn Das he started dancing and shouting joyfully in Kashmiri,' *Ramas Aav Lakshman Ji*,' 'Ram has got Lakshman,' and on the same date the spouse of Narayan Das, Arnimal, gave birth to an illustrious son, who later became famous as Ishwar Saroopa Swami Lakshman Ji Maharaj of Shaiva Ashram of Ishibar, Nishat.

With the blessing of the Guru, the small scale trade of the devotee flourished and took the right direction. Narayan Das, though being a close devotee of Sawmi Ram Ji, would now remain busy with his business and could spare very little time for looking after his down town house where he had stationed his Guru. So one day he gifted this house to his Guru so that he could use it in his own way. Swami Ram Ji established the first Shri Ram (Trika) Shaiva Ashram in this house in the year 1884 and started a series of discourses on Kashmir Shaiva Philosophy from this house from this date onwards. Now Swami Ji completely kept himself off from all worldly matters and remained engrossed in the deep meditation thinking deeply on matters of philosophy and sharing them with his followers.

In order to save his merchandise from the disastrous weather conditions, Narayan Das made one more experiment. He fitted the side walls and partition walls of his barge with wooden board sheets and also got the roof of the boat covered properly with the Devadar shingles. This type of boat resembled our present day House Boats. Before he could use it for the purpose for which it was got built, a foreign visitor very much appreciated the new boat and wanted to have it for his personal residence on the waters of the Dal Lake and offered a handsome price for it. This gave an idea to Narayan Das to continue this well paying trade of building house boats instead of having a floating shop in it. With the grace of his Guru, Swami Ram ji, this trade of construction of house boats in the valley flourished and it proved a good and profitable business for Narayan Das, who got the nickname of Nava Naran from the people of Kashmir for adopting this trade.

Shri Ram (Trika) Shaiva Ashram at Fateh Kadal also flourished under the able guidance of Swami Ram ji. People attended the Ashram daily early in the morning to listen to the scholarly discourses of Swami Ram. People of brilliance like Swami - Mahtab Kakh, Govind Koul Jalali, Swami Vidhyadhar Ji, Hari Ram Bhagwan, Kantha Kakh (Bayu), Kashi Kakh Bhat (Master), Aftab Koul, Govind Koul and many others assembled at the feet of Swami Ji to profit by the spiritual flavour of his discourses. All of them were earnest devotees of Swami Ji, who gave them right guidance and quenched their spiritual thirst.

Having been initiated to sainthood at the feet of the Holy Mother, 'Kali', Swami Vivekananda was directed by his Guru, Swami Ram Krishen Paramhamsa to visit Sharada Desha and seek the blessings of Mother Rajnya before taking any foreign tours. It is said that Swami Vivekananda, on reaching Kashmir, was very much impressed by the Trika Shaiva philosophy and in order to get a clearer understanding of the thought, he visited the Trika Ashram and met Swami Ram Ji for attainment of perfection in spirituality and the latter advised him to touch the lotus feet of Maha Rajnya at Tulamula for attainment of all the wished Siddhis. It was he who directed him to visit the "World Religious Conference held in U.S.A. Swami Vivekananda was so much fascinated by the grandeur of Mother's presence at Tulamula that he stayed there for complete three days until he was graced by the Mother and he got spiritual solace at Her sacred feet. He attended the World Religious Conference held at Chicago, U.S.A., in the year 1913 and placed before the representatives of this world body the religious thought of India.

Swami Ji had predicted the date of his Nirvan to his close devotees and accordingly, he left his mortal remains on 23rd January, 1915 and the day was Magha Krishna Chaturdashi, the most venerated day of Shiva Chaturdashi which is held by the Hindu population of the whole sub-continent in great reverence. On the Nirwan of Swami Ji, Swami Mahtab Kakh, a Shaivaite scholar of the Trika philosophy of Kashmir and the worthy son of Pandit Chandra Kakh, a renowned Karma Kandi, Scholar of Sanskrit language and Sharada Script who was also a Shaiva philosopher of repute and a resident of Krandigam, Anantnag, looked after the Ashram till his Nirvan in the year 1942. In the mean time the Shaiva Ashram was headed by a great Shaivite and Sanskrit Scholar, Swami Govind Koul Jalali who served the Ashram till the year 1957 and during the early years of the second half of this millennium, Shri T.N.Ganjoo, a Sanskrit Scholar of repute attended the Ashram for the study of the Shaivism under the able guidance of the great Shaivite scholar, Swami Govinda Koul Jalali, his Guru and studied Shaivism till 1957, the year of his Nirvan. After the Nirvan of Govinda Koul Jalali the Ashram was looked after by Pandit Tarachand Nahru for some time. Soon after Mr. Nehru, the affairs of the Ashram came under the able guidance of Prof. (Dr) T. N. Ganjoo, Ex., Head of the Post graduate Departments of Hindi and Sanskrt, University of Kashmir, Srinagar. Being a scholar of repute in Sanskrit, Hindi, Kashmiri, English, Linguistics and an expert in Sharada script, he added new dimensions to this Ashram. The activities of the Ashram increased four fold under his able guidance till the year 1989. It was with the blessings of the Guru, Swami Ram Ji on Prof Ganjoo that he stayed back in the valley even after the year 1990, when the whole Hindu population of Kashmir was forced to migrate to other parts of India due to Kashmir militancy. He is still continuing his daily presence at the Trika (Shaiva) Ashram at the feet of Swami Ram Ji. The devotees of Swami Ram Ji who left the valley in the year 1990 or afterwards, have established a replica of Shri Ram (Trika) Shaiva Ashram at Jammu for the benefit of the Jammu devotees.[1]

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[1] The information contained in the article has the support of:
a). Salikani Kashmir-o-Hind, Sant Mala Pt I and II, July, 1963. by Dilbar Kashmiri,
b). Kashmir Ki Sant Parampara,Publisher, Bhagwan Gopi Nath Trust, Udayvala, Jammu, Ed. By Prof. (Dr.) B.L. Koul, year, 2008.

Master Zinda Koul

Master Zinda Koul

The mystic poet

Kashmir has been a land of seers and saints from ancient times. A good number of our poets have expressed their experiences of the Devine in their own way which to the reader appear something foggy, though it might have been an experience as clear as the day light for the poet himself. There is a long list of such poets like Abhinavagupta, Utpaladeva, Mankha, Vasugupta, Rajanaka Rattana Kantha, Kshemendra, Kshemraja, Ananda Vardhana, Somdeva, Somananda, Varadaraja, Bhatta Kalatta Pandit Kalhana, Bilhana, Ratnakara, Jonraja, Jayaratha, Shrivara, Mamat, and others who have expressed their Divine experiences in this manner in our our past. The stream of such poets did not stop there. In the second millennium this practice was carried forward by Shiti Kantha, Lal Ded, Jagdhar Bhat, Rupa Bhawani, and a horde of Sofi poets who expressed the Divine in their own way. We can safely place Master Zinda Koul as one among the most illustrious mystic poets of modern Kashmir.

Master Ji was born on 17th July, 1884 at Shilitaing, Srinagar in an ordinary Kashmiri Pandit family of Pandit Lakshman Joo Koul who worked hard to make both his ends meet. His mother, Smt Padmawati was a saintly lady who managed the family expenses with great care and restraint knowing that the economic condition of the family was not sound. She tried her best to keep her son on the right track in spite of all ordeals. After completing the eighth class examination, the deteriorating economic condition of the family compelled young Zinda Koul to work at a photographer's shop. The young boy continued his studies further side by side his private employment and he passed his Matriculation examination from Lahore University with distinction in the year 1902. He was appointed as a teacher in Hindu School, a private educational institution at Fateh Kadal, Srinagar. He passed his B.A. examination in the year 1915 while serving as a private teacher. He was appointed as a teacher by the State Govt., and he attained his superannuation from the State Education Department in the year 1940. During the reign of Maharaja Hari Singh, he got re-employment as a clerk and translator in the State Research Department under the supervision of Pandit Ram Chand Kak after his retirement as a teacher. He proved to be a good translator yet he was popularly known as 'Master Ji' among his acquaintances. He was married at a very young age and his spouse, Siddha Laksahmi gave birth to two sons. The elder one, Janki Nath Koul passed away in the prime of his youth and that gave the greatest blow to Master ji. The younger son Jaggan Nath Koul survived and continued further the family of Master Ji. Master Ji lived a disciplined life and expected the same from others. He remained a vegetarian all his life.

Master Ji had a very good knowledge of a number of languages, like Urdu, Persian, Sanskrit, Hindi and English. He was particularly a scholar of Persian and English literature. Kashmiri was his mother tongue and he had a deep understanding of history and culture of Kashmir. He started writing poetry in Urdu and his pen name was 'Sabit'. Pandit Aftab Joo Kava, whose penname was, 'Aftab' was his contemporary and he (Aftab) has given a reference to this effect in one of his couplets. [1] He composed his poetry in Kashmiri at a much later stage of his life. His first collection of Kashmiri lyrics was published by the Lala Rukh Publications along with its English translation under the title 'Sumran' in the year 1955. He got Sahitya Akademi Award, a citation and a prize of Rs. 5,000/- for this book. He was a mystic poet and he avoided pomp and show. He defined the Reality of the Ultimate in the form of 'Raza', 'Guru','Ishta Deva', etc., and in all these words he expressed the same thirst of His presence. He can safely be categorized as a poet of Bhakti Moment in Kashmir because all his lyrics compel the reader to proceed further on the path of devotion. He had a very deep understanding of the ancient Indian civilization, religion and social history. He was an embodiment of love, a devout humanitarian and an epitome of spiritual peace and harmony, which is the essence of Shrimad Bgad Gita and he preached all this during his life time. Noor Mohd Roshan, a contemporary of Master Ji, who was a famous revolutionary poet, critic, reformer, prose writer and editor, once remarked regarding him, "To introduce Master Zinda Koul (to the audience) is to show a small oil-lamp to the Sun because everybody knows his position and literary status as a poet. I have not felt the cool breeze of Bhakti from any of the Kashmiri poets except from Parmanand and Bulbul. But giving it a Sofi colour, Master Ji has tried to give the depth of infinity to the description of the Holy One. It is necessary that one should have an accurate knowledge of the Indian civilization to understand and grasp the poetic flavour in his poetry." For the common man the poetry of Master Ji was just a riddle. It was read and people sang it on the festive occasions not because they understood it but because they believed it and it was written in the most rhythmic style.

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[1] *Sabit na kar sawal bataaun main kya tujhe* I
woh Aftab charakh ka maaraa kahan gaya II
*Gashiri,*Ed.,by M.L.Saqui,Pub., Cultural Forum, Chadoora, year, 1974, p.106.

He was a follower of Bhakti Marga. He never remained aloof from the experiences of the worldly life during his long life. One can visualize a touching account of the human experiences in his poetry that one is bound to appreciate. On the whole his poetry is neither a call for revolution, nor a struggle in the field for any material upliftment, but the yearning of a common man for common values that seem to him vanishing away from the society.

He was very fond of listening to the Sofiyana and Lila singers. He would sit for hours in the company of such people in the famous Pratap Park of Srinagar in a solitary corner without inviting any attention from the general public, hearing their melodious voice in complete solitude and without the company of any musical instruments; when they had no spare time to accompany him to his home. Otherwise he held such functions at his home to hear their sweet voice and he enjoyed full nights in the company of such singers.[1] In this way Master JI can be categorized among the great stalwarts of the Sofi tradition who clamoured and wished for Salvation and liberation from the cycle of re-birth for all his life.

A few samples from his Kashmiri poetry are given here for the information of the readers along with its English renderings:

Raza' pana'ney desha dramut yor Aamut ginda'ne ,
Natsa.nas zan Mo'ra Aamut yor Aamut ginda'ne I
Mati hyotmut chhun safar tra'vith gáruk Aaram Prang ,
Tath ba'ras dith to'r Aamut yor Aamut ginda'ne[2] II

The knight separated from his own country
Has come to dance here.
His dance resembles to that of a peacock
Who has come here to dance with us,
Leaving the pleasures of his home bedstead,
He embraced the ordeals of long travel,
Has shut down and sealed the doors of that house,
And has come to dance here.

Garveth sombran chhiva maara' ga'ma'ti' ,
Chhyanith ta' thakith pema'ti' I
Gara rozi yati ta' kath kyut bha'riv,
Chhari tariv apour, Kanh masa tariv apour II

You seem extinct in collecting your household things,
Completely tired and shattered you are I
The house is to remain here, why all this collection?
You have to reach the other end less by your belongings,
Is anybody willing to accompany me? (to the next end)[3] II

Yiman joyan andar yo'dvai chhu chane sahaz Dharmuk zal,
Bathyan hund chhus samyomut mal,

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[1] The revelation was made to the author by late Master Chuni Lal Bhat of Noor Pora, Tral, who was a Sofiana/Lila singer and played such programmes on the then Radio Station, Srinagar during early sixties. Impressed by the sweet and melodious voice of the singer, Master Ji had blessed Mr Bhat at a literary gathering held in the Auditorium of the Station.

[2] *Sumran*, by Master Zinda Koul, Lalla Rukh Pub., p. 8, Title: '*Razaa*'

[3] Ibid., p. 48, Title: " *Kanh ma sa Tariv Apour*."

Me chavum Aagrai lo lo II
The water of these rivulets contain the flow of simple Dharma,
But the impurities assembled on both its shores, have
Polluted the whole of it,
I wish you make me to drink from the very source of it.[1]
Go'ra' bavanaaye sa'ti' sher, no'mrith kho'ran tal traavasay
Gara' baar tai Aasun basub, so'ruy panun pushiraavsay,
Gata'pa'chhi' cha'nda'r zan naam roop,
Akh Akh kalaa vyaglaava'say II
Having utter belief in you as my Guru
I bow my head on thy feet,
I surrender before thee all that belongs to me,
All my things, my home and hearth, my comforts,
I shall disclose myself digit by digit before thee.
Like the perishing moon of the dark fortnight[2] I
So'rum su Laala' ro'kh manas,
Jalaav log Kanzal vanas,
Pho'rum su naar khe'rmanas,
Logus na' da'm ti zethanas,
Dilas hyotun jigar tatyav,
Ta' shor voth zi naar ha II
I remembered my beloved in my heart
My whole body burnt as if in the Kanzalvan fire,
The penetration of the fire was limitless,
It engulfed my heart and heated my liver,
And there was a loud cry, 'Fire!' 'Fire!'[3]

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[1] Gashiri' Ed., M.L.Saqui, Pub., Azad Cultural Forum, Chadoora, Year, 1974, p. 109.

[2] Gashiri' Ed., M.L.Saqui, Pub., Azad Cultural Forum, Chadoora, Year, 1974, p.,109.

[3] Ibid., p. 110.

Chapter - v.

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

(*Our Pooja Paddati*)

The religious practices performed by the Kashmiri Pandits are not in any way different from those religious activities prevalent among the Hindus who live in different parts of the sub-continent or beyond. Like many other such practices, Poojana is also a common activity of the Hindus of the Indian sub-continent that includes the area of Jammu and Kashmir as well, though slight differences do exist in its observance due the peculiar geographical and climatic conditions. It can not be denied that the variegated religious philosophies practiced by different sects like the Vaidantics, the Vaishnavits, the Shaivits, the Jainas, and the Buddhists, played their part in making and shaping our religious practices but at the end of the day, the peculiar enduring and tolerant social structure of this land made all these philosophies complementary to one another and not contradictory and Kashmir took a leading part in doing so. The fountain head of all our ritualistic and religious practices, the Nilamata Purana, stands a witness to it. With the passage of time the Vaishnava and the Shaiva philosophies left their deep impact on all the religious practices of the sub-continent and these assumed a local colour while spreading in various corners of the country. The same was the fate with our ancient religious practices when it came in contact with other philosophies including the renaissance of the Kashmir Shaivism. No doubt, due to its geography and environment that included the high mountain barriers as well, the valley remained a little aloof from the rest of the country and the patterns that involved immediate and visible change in the rest of the sub-continent had no visible, direct or immediate effect on the patterns of worship in the valley

The word Pooja is derived from the Sanskrit word (Pujya) - Poojanam. The basic conception is, "Poojaneeyam poojite iti Pooja," – 'the adoration of anything that is worth worshipping'. The early man worshipped Nature in her varied forms including various phenomena like the seasons- hot and wet, bright days and dark nights, drought and devastating rains, bumper crops and delicious fruit, so on and so forth. As a matter of fact all these phenomena were beyond his understanding and control. Gradually he used his imagination and that was how he created different gods and deities out of this phenomena. These gods and deities became objects of his worship but at the same time the Vedic faith in the Super Force that he named as Param/Brahma-Shiva-Atma, which propelled this whole universe, attained more importance in his daily worship.

Though there is no particular fixed time for Poojanam, yet some such rules for the daily worship and the practices attached to it were laid down by our Vedic Acharyas or Rishis, and that are known as "Trikala Sandhya"- three specific times for God worship. Commenting on various aspects of worship required for the Poojanam, the Narsimha Purana, as we shall see in the coming pages, has laid stress on three types of utterances while adoring a deity and this process is followed even today while pursuing such methods of worship. Besides, the Purana emphasizes the use of a number of ingredients required for such Poojanam. It has further been stressed that in case the recitation is to be readout from a book, the devotee must arrange a desk for placing such books/scriptures on it so that he/she makes use of it at ease and with devotion. It is also advised to venerate the scriptures before using them in our religious practices and we know it as "Pustak Poojanam". This process is completed after applying a "Tilakam" of ones choice or as per tradition on our fore-heads. Cleanly dressed and seated on a sanctified sitting mat/rug/carpet (Asana Shodhanam), and after tying tightly ones hair, if any, the devotee should sit facing east on all such occasions. Before starting the Pooja, the devotee should rinse ones mouth (Achamanam) four times for the purification of his own self, using the 'Beeja Mantra' [1] of the particular deity selected for veneration. The fact that the Indian philosophy

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Mantra is the word or utterance that carries the god-head or the power of the god-head as laid down in a particular *Vedic Richa.*

Rig Veda. 7. 10, 3.

accepts rebirth or the eternity of the soul, the devotee attains the position of immortality bestowed on him by the Vedic Rishi by chanting the Moola Manbtra for veneration of a particular deity at a particular time and occasion [1] The following steps are generally followed once a devotees starts worshipping a deity:-

1. Lighting of the oil lamp as the symbol of Eternal Light, and placing it at the right corner facing towards the Kalasha;
2. Bhoomi Poojana, sanctifying the place where the Pooja is performed
3. Veneration of the Guru/teacher;
4. "Surya Namaskar", offering water to the Sun and considering it as the "Pratyaksha Deva", a witness to all our performances;
5. Wearing the "Pavitri" in the ring-finger before initiating the Poojanam [2].
6. Invoking the presence of Kshetra Pals (two small vessels, considered to be the body-guards at all the Yajnyashalas), by

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[1] The Vedas describe that all the human beings are the begotten of Immortality. (*Amrit Putra* , hence the reassessment of the, "*Mool*" - the 'origin'..
Rg Vedd, 10,13, 1.

[2] While performing the religious rites big or small, the devotees are directed to use a ring type formation of *Kusha* grass in the ring finger. The scriptures contain and the devotees firmly believe that the fruit of any of the religious performances goes to the *Asuras,(Demons), i*f performed without using the said ring specially made from Kusha grass and named 'Pavitri'. The sanction for the mythical belief goes to the *Ramayana* period. It is believed that Ram had cremated *Jattayu* on the two wrists of his arms as he (*Jattayu)* had been cursed not to be cremated on the naked earth. Now that *Jattayu* was a *Rakshasa* by birth but being a devotee of Ram he laid his life fighting *Ravana* on the forceful abduction of *Sita.* Cremation of the devotee by Ram was considered uncalled for, for he (Jattayu) was a Rakshasa by birth. Ram, who is also called the *Purushottama* in our scriptures and that he is also considered as the fore-runner in performance of all rites and rituals of his followers, he was debarred from performing any religious performances till his purification. As Ram had lifted the dead body of the bird Jattayu with his ring finger for cremation on the wrists of his two arms joined together, the learned gentry of the hour had advised that Ram would wear the sanctified and specially made, "*Pavitri*" in his ring finger while performing all future religious performances. As already explained that we consider ourselves the "*Amrit Putras*" – the decedents of the 'Supreme Force', hence we wear the *Kusha* grass ring in our ring finger on all such occasions of veneration even today.

offering them a little water and some grains of barley and rice; and placing them at the right corner of the Havanshala.

After completing all these formalities, the devotee meditates for the presence of the deity, called "Dhyanam", while reciting the Mantra without break or as directed, by the concerned Rishi for the invocation of the deity. One thing is to be borne in mind that there are different Rishis and Mantras for invoking different deities but the invocation of Ganesha as the possessor of all Siddhis and that of Vishnu as the main Vedic god, supercede all such invocations.

Strictly speaking a Hindu boy, while going through all the Sanskars including the Yajnyopavita after which he attains the position of a Dwij (twice-born or attaining the second birth); is bestowed with three basic obligations; which one has to fulfill invariably to keep oneself into the Hindu fold. These three obligations are described as 'Tri- Rin' in our scriptures. Our ancestors have laid down these obligations for their progeny to keep them in the Hindu fold. In the common Kashmiri language these are categorized under the title "Diva Pye'ta'r.", meaning offerings to the 'deities and the mains,'. These are: -

1) Obligations towards the Devas (deities), called the Deva Rin,
2) Duties towards Rishis/ preceptors, called the Rishi Rin, and
3) Reverence towards our ancestors or manes, called the Pitri Rin.

All the obligations are explained and elucidated below :-

i. **Deva Rin -** Obligations towards the deities.

It is our firm belief that the wishes of gods,(Devas) or deities or of the unknown natural forces that exist in this universe and manage our life and stimulate our actions, invite our obedience. We believe that things like good weather, crops, rains, sunshine, etc. are all the blessings of our deities and Devas (gods), therefore, we have accepted obligations towards all these deities and gods from ancient times Besides, observing the path of piety and truthfulness are essentials for such blessings and we have to venerate and please the Devas by performing Havans on different occasions by performing recite a number of Swahakars/ Sahasranams on such occasions. It is also involves helping the needy and the destitute open heartedly and according to one's capacity.

ii. Rishi Rin – This denotes our obligations towards our Rishis/ preceptors, etc. In ancient times there were no schools, colleges or universities just as we have now-a-days. There used to be the 'Gurukulas' or hermitages in deep forests where different branches of knowledge and learning were taught to the students. Great seers and scholars, who were considered authorities in their respective fields of knowledge, headed these Ashrams. The parents would send their children to these 'Gurukulas' as early as possible so that their wards could get the best of attention and education in such hermitages. The children, after completing their education would return from these Gurukula after a few years as fully developed youth possessing knowledge and experience of life. In this way these Rishis were doing a commendable service to the society as a whole and the society too had an obligation to take care of the day-to-day needs of these hermitages. Hence the 'Rishi Rin' was one of the most important obligations for all the parents. The society had an obligations for such of our preceptors even though they might have departed long before and they completed this obligation by remembering them and by offering them fresh water and salutations every morning.

iii. Pitri Rin – It is our obligations towards our forefathers/ manes. We, the Hindus, believe that every man has an obligation towards his father, mother, grand father, grand mother and great grand fathers and mothers, (both maternal and paternal totaling 12 manes), likewise we have the obligation towards all those elderly persons who were related to us from our father/mother's side and are dead now. All these persons are worth our reverence and devotion. Our obligation towards them is called 'Pitri Rin'. We complete these obligations, by performing the Shraaddha ceremonies of all the departed manes twice in a year on the dates of their death anniversaries and the Pitripaksha respectively, as directed in our scriptures.

Poojanam: The word Poojanam means veneration. Our love, devotion and respect for the Ultimate Reality or God, is Pooja. We extend this veneration to our elders, teachers, preachers and our well-wishers. Pooja is defined as, "Poojayati iti Pooja", whatever thing, person or place we venerate in whatever way is Pooja. The *Shiva Sutras* define Pooja as Upasana – a spontaneous effortless meditation that makes one to 'see', the eternal Shiva. *Shiva Stotrawali* says that the desire to make all efforts required for the attainment of perfection through meditation, is the real established way of veneration (Pooja). [1]

Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha, has given a lucid description of various aspects of Poojanam. It says that whatever source gives a feeling of expansion in joy in the mind of a devotee is Pooja. [2] This fact corroborates with the idea put forth by Acharya Abhinavagupta in his famous treatise, *Tantraloka*, referred to in the said Kosha at a number of places.

The essence of Pooja for all the people who go through all these practices is to attain a feeling of total satisfaction and joy on the completion of all such practices. [3] The process to attain this perfection is to overwhelmingly fill ones whole body with the sweet essence of Shiva so much so that our attachment with the outer world remains confined to the Bhairava Tatva alone. It advocates filling completely all our senses with the flavour of Shiva so that our body alone exists before Him. In *Tantraloka* (29/24) and *Tantraloka Viveka* (F.11/2 p.21), Aacharya Abhinagupta and Jayaratha, respectively, have elucidated this aspect of Pooja more lucidly saying that the devotees leave all the outward supports once they attain the perfect Bhairava Tatva while performing the Poojanam [4].

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[1] *Dhyanaayasatiraskaara siddhastvatsprashnotsavah I*
Poojaa vidhiriti khyato bhakhtaanaam sa sadaa astu me II.
Shiva Stotrawali in *Ss*. 17, 4

[2] *Hirdaye aananda vikaaspradam yatyat tat tat eva poojaa saadhanam prashastam I*
Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha by Baljinath Pandit and others, Shri Ranvir Parisar, Jammu, year-2005, p. 403.

[3] *Smastasyapi kaarakavraatasya Shivamayeebhaavaapaadanam hi poojaadikriyaayaa Aantaram saarabhutam tatvam.*
Ibid., p. 403

[4] *Shiva rasena trapitasakala shareeraango Yogi baahyalambanaani saakshyat Bhairavatvena pashyati* I (*Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Kosha*, p. 403)

The word Yamala, means a 'twin' but what comes into being with the assimilation of Shiva with Shakti in the form of Parvati, is known as the Devi Yamala in Shaiva Darshan. The Yamala also advocates eight most important elements worth worshipping. These are: 1. Guru (preceptor/ teacher), 2. Shastras (religious texts), 3. Devas, (our deities), 4. Vahni, (the Sacred Fire), 5. Gyani, (the learned people), 6. Vriddhanstriyo, (old ladies), 7 Vrittam, (vows) and, 8. Guru Vargam, (the teaching class as a whole) [1]. Thus the devotee is led to a state where he wants to attain the knowledge of all these things including the one which is beyond common perception or comprehension. Shaiva philosophy names it as Para Shakti. It is a state of mind when all the thought-streams assemble in the real sense and become a single entity called 'Para Shakti' in *Shaiva Pooja*. This fact corroborates with the thoughts expressed by Acharya Abhinavagupta in the *Tantraloka* as well.[2]

According to the *Aagama Shastra* of Shaiva Philosophy, Pooja does not mean veneration by way of showering flowers or through different libations only, though done with great effort. Pooja done with dedication, meditation, or inner admiration unto the one (Shiva) who is beyond the skies, is, in fact, Pooja worth the name.[3] It is because of this very fact that the Shaiva Kriya, (Shraaddhas, etc.) slightly differs from the Vaishnavite rituals.

The Rishis of various Puranas, Epics, Shrutis and Smritis venerated gods and goddesses in their devotional songs and thus a more sophisticated and a well-developed branch of devotional poetry came into existence. Different patterns of devotion known as "Margas" like: Bhakti Marga, (Devotional track), Gyana

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[1] *Ashtaanaam poojyanaam poojanam I samayadeekshaayam samayavisheshah: Yathaa:*
"Gurum shastram deva vahni gyanavriddhaamstriyo vratam I
Guruvargam yathaa shaktya pujiyet ashtakam tvidam II
Ext. from *Devi Yamala. Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha, p. 403-04.*

[2] *Bhaavaughasya chidekeekaar eva vastavikee Para cha Shaivee Poojaa I*
Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha, p., 404.

[3] *Poojaa naama na pushpaargeyamati kriyate dridhaa I*
Nirvikalpye pare vyomni sa poojaa hyadaraalayah II
Vigyaan Bharrva, V,147, Ibid., p., 404

Marga, (attainment through knowledge/ education), Karma Marga, (achievement through action not subordinate to the results), etc came into existence. The saints and seers, who propounded all these Margas, further classified them into traits, like: 1) devotion to the extent of blind faith, 2) meditation through Japa, Tapa, and 3) actions through Karmakanda, (Homa), etc. These again underwent a further classification. For Instance, the *Narasimha Purana* classifies "Japa" under the following three categories and it also emphasises that the last one is the best one:-

1. Vachika: loud or audible recitation of mantras or devotional songs in praise of a god or a deity,
2. Upamshu, : inaudible recitation of mantras or songs where only movement of lips or tongue is allowed without making any kind of sound or noise, and
3. Mansika: recitation of mantras or devotional practices by heart/Mana, without any movement of body limbs or making any sounds, etc.[1]

During the Brahminical era, before the advent of Buddhism, different steps for the veneration at Pooja of gods were specified and streamlined. In course of time conducting of Pooja instead of being an individual domestic affair, became a professional thing and an institution itself. A special class of the society came into being that guided the general public in the art of veneration (Poojana). The learned society of Brahmins was classified into different sects and the highly learned was known as "Dvija", the twice born. *Manu Smriti* says, "*Janamanah jayite Shudro, karmanah/ sanskarat Dwijo bhavet.,*" meaning "Man is born as a low caste but deeds/ Sanskars elevate him to the position of a Brahmin." Yajnyopavita or, "Yoni", as we call it in the Kashmiri language, is considered as the most important of all the Sanskars that refines a child and makes him worthy to be called a Dvija. It also enables him to become a Karma Kandi and thus remain associated with his family traditions; etc. This also enables him to shoulder his family responsibilities for the performance of Yajnyas, Shraaddhas etc., to the extent his economic conditions allow him. A special dress code, a different and definite way of day-to-day living, eating habits, etc., all underwent a change for this affluent priestly class of people. The patterns for venerating different deities, gods, goddesses, Rishis and manes are laid down for the people for venerating them. The ingredients required and the rules of performances advocated for such venerations were also specified. It may be pointed out that while laying down the rules, primary importance was given to the Jiva Dharma that includes the welfare of the members of that family and the safety of their homes and hearths, the locality and the surroundings where they live. In this way the material and worldly considerations too crept into the simple Pooja performances. All the other obligations were deemed as secondary and the seeker was advised to take them up on a need based preference. It is a common saying among the people of the material world, "First Atma (self) and then Paramatma. (God)".It may be recalled that this concept takes a reverse turn in absolute Bhakti Marga but that stage is too far away from the life of the common man. In this way the practices for veneration have changed through ages and attained the present variegated forms.

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[1]. *Vaachikashcha upaamshashcha maanasastri vidhi smritah I*
Trayanaam japayjyanaam shreshtyam syath uttarotaram II
Narasimha Purana.

The great Rishis who composed the *Shrutis* and *Smritis* impressed upon the worshipper to keep himself clean by properly bathing himself and by putting on clean washed clothes that include his/her Asana (the rug or mat on which he/she sits for Pooja), before beginning any kind of worship. Abhinava Gupta has given a lucid description of cleanliness, etc. He is of the opinion that bathing in itself is cleanliness and cleanliness in itself is next to godliness.[1] While elucidating further his "*Shuddha-ashuddha Bhava*", Abhinavagupta in his treatise, *Malinee Vijaya Vartikam*, is of the opinion that 'a man totally devoted to the betterment of others can easily be differentiated from the chaste and the unchaste. Otherwise the things remain un-altered in respect of the people who are soft witted.[1]

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[1] *Snaanam cha shuddhataa uchyate, Shuddhataa cha Parameshwara swarupaa samaaveshah II*

Ext. from *Tantra Saarah* by Abhinavagupta, p., 129.

Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha, p. 700

After washing the Yajnyopavita properly or putting on a new one (in the case of males only), the person who starts veneration, has been directed to put it on around the neck and under the right arm while venerating the Devas/gods. It is to be kept round under the left arm while venerating the manes; and round the neck only and placed round the two thumbs of one's hands when the offerings are made to the Rishis. The worshipper starts with the *Bhumi Poojanam* (sanctification of that part of the ground or place where Pooja is performed) which is followed by *Anga Nyasa*, (pledge to involve all parts of the body in the performance of worship). The worshipper makes his/her *Aatma Shuddhi*, (self-purification), by sprinkling sanctified water on his/her own self so that he/she attains the position of "*Amrit Putra*". He/she must feel that the deity, he/she is worshipping, is present before him/her and in this way he/she begins the veneration or Poojanam of the deity.

It may be pointed out that laying the Kalasha is the first essential thing in each Poojanam and its formation is different for different rites and rituals and accordingly the invocation of the deities also differs. Every major Poojanam, like the Yajnyopavita, marriage, Havans (Swahakars), or performance of the death rites and holding the Shraaddha rituals for our departed ones, require laying of the Kalasha before any such Poojana is initiated. The ordinary Kalasha, known as Brahama Kalasha, is laid for the performance of the rites of our departed ones whereas Indra Kalasha also known as Deva Kalasha is laid for all other major rituals.[2] A few specimens of such varied Indra Kalashas connected with the performance of some of the Deva Kriyas (Pages 425-26) and Brahma Kalashas for Pitri Kriya

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[1] *Shuddhaashuddha vibhedhohi parmaartha katha su no* I
Sa tu tat krit evaaste mudhaanaam dhiyi nishchalah II
Malinee Vijaya Vartikam, by Abhinavagupta, v: 1,105, *Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha, p, 699.*

[2] .The *Karma Kandi* No:2 by Jyotshi Keshav Bhat, year, 1933 contains as many as 24 diagrams or *Kalashas* that are laid while performing various rites and rituals connected with different types of worships.

(Page: 427-28).are given in the Addenda I, and II. However, no Kalasha is laid in the daily routine venerations including the birthday Pooja, etc. One thing, however, is common that the devotees have been advised to use clean and unsoiled carpets/rugs, preferably woolen ones for all such Poojanam.

The main Poojanam includes:

1. Avahana: invitation to the deity at the place of veneration,
2. Asana: presentation of seat to the deity,
3. Padhya: washing the feet of the deity with fresh water that includes some herbs and puffed rice etc.
4. Arghya : washing the face of the deity with fresh water that includes milk, yoghurt, ghee, Darbha, puffed rice and barley,
5. Abhisheka: giving a bath to the deity with fresh water,
6. Gandha: offering the Tilakam (Vermilion /sandalwood or saffron- as the case may be,) and flowers,
7. Poojana: Veneration that include, lighting the lamp, (Rattan Deepam), incense (Dhoopam), camphor (Karpooram), and singing of the devotional songs, (Aarthi) as well,
8. Vastram: offering clothing to the deity that includes Na'rivan as well,
9. Naivedyam: offering food,
10. Achamanam, Rinsing the mouth with water at the beginning and at the close of worship, and
11. Visarjanam: - final departure of the deity from the place of veneration.

The devotees, during the course of veneration, are expected to follow some additional steps while observing varied rites and rituals as contained in the scriptures besides those stated above. Generally a selected number of steps are taken so as to make the Poojana easier and less time consuming. These include, Avahanam, Asanam, Amantranam Padhyam, Abhishekam Arghyam, Gandham or Tilakam, Argam and Pushpam, Vastram (Na'rivan), Poojanam, Naivedyam, Achamanam, and Visarjanam. These are the main steps that generally form a part of our common Pooja Paddatis.

1. Avahanam: Avahana literarily means invocation of a deity. It is a respectful and prayerful invitation to the deity or deities for their presence at a selected place of worship. Jayarath, (1100-1200 A.D.), a disciple of Kalhana [1] and a great scholar of Shaiva Shatstra, in his treatise, *Tantraloka Viveka*, has defined the term Avahana as 'to make possible the presence of one who is not present'.[2] Acharya Abhinavagupta while defining various steps of Poojana, has defined in his treatise, *Tantraaloka*, both, the Aavahana and the Visarjana. According to him, 'The invocation and veneration of the deity and his/her final departure after veneration or completion of the task 'Visarjana' is just an imagination of the devotee who feels satisfied after the completion of the task, otherwise the request for the attendance and the departure of the deity are both immaterial for the one who is in search of the Higher Truth or for the wise gentry'. But for the ordinary people there is perpetual inclination for making a reference to Avahana.[3]

2. Asana: Asana means offering a seat to the deity after we invoke him/her and pray for his/her attendance at a particular function and/or place. This offering necessarily comprises either few petals of a flower or a few small lengths of Darbha also called Kusha and the place for such assemblage or sitting place for the deity/deities is just close to the Kalasha in case, however, the ritual involves the installing of a Kalasha. [4]

Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha, (Pt.I), Ed., by Pt. Baljinath Pandit and others and Published by Shri Ranvir Sanskrit Kendriya Vidhya Peetha, Jammu, (2001), on page 87-88 has laid nineteen different hymns for offering Asana to a number of deities invoked while performing different rituals and rites by the devotees and Yogis for the fulfillment of their different wishes. *Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha* has also defined the 'Asana' as an 'imaginative ingredient of offering a seat to a deity while venerating him/her on different occasions.' It also lays that it should be a serious but notional feeling of the devotee that he/she is seated face to face in the presence of the deity.[1]

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[1] Jayrathasya Guru: 1) Sangadharo asya Vidhya Guru, Shankhdharo vaayam; 2) Kalyana (Kalhana) asya Shaiva Shastra Guru……I
Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha, Pt I, p. 230.

[2] Aavahanam, "*Anabhimukhasyabhimukhi karanam*" II
Tantraaloka Viveka,,Part 1,ii., p. 22.

[3] *Vaasanaavaahyate devi vaasanaa cha visrijyate I*
Paramaarthena devasya naavaahana visarjane II
Praaninaam prabuddhaanaam santosha jananaaya vai I
Aavaahanaadhikam teshyam pravrittih katham anyathaa II
Tantraaloka, Abhinavagupta,, 26, 45-48.

[4] .*Kalasha* is laid in case of rituals like marriage, *Yajnyopavita*, or rites like the *Shraaddha* of our manes, Rishis or Guru/Teacher or a ritual or rite under the category of Havana, etc. that involves kindling of the Holy Fire, etc.

3. Amantranam: Amantrana is an act of respectful invitation offered to a deity on a specific date at a particular function. *Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha,* lucidly describes that it is an act that has 'universal acceptance for placing before the deity, etc., all those things of his choice by the Yogi for the realization of his own self and for the pleasure of the deity. Amantrana is described as an act of humble invitation to the deity and putting all those things before the deity that the devotee likes for his/her own self. *Tantraaloka* defines it as an act of venerating the deity in two different ways. The first is that the deity exists before him/her by imagining what he looks like and the other is when he/she offers a sitting place (Asana) to him/her at the place of veneration. The treatise further elucidates that in this way the devotee makes an attempt to venerate his/her own self in the form of 'Para' and 'Apara' Shakhtis. This also includes all those Super Powers, the devotee has concentrated upon. [2] Somananda (850-900 A.D.) in his book, *Shiva Drishti*, has beautifully explained this fact while defining the word, 'Poojanam.'. He describes that Shiva Yogi is as the 'venerator,' Shiva is as the 'venerated' and that the ingredients collected for venerating are 'the changed forms of His Own Self – Shiva.' It further explains that the venerators of the Brahma/Parama Brahma, venerate Him as Sada Shiva, while others venerate him as Shiva. The fact is that with whatever action the devotee gets satisfied, is the essence of 'Poojanam 'in the real sense.[1]

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[1] '*Aasanam, - Poojana vishesho bhaavanaathmakah' yatha*;
"*Sannidhaana mudriya poojaam prityonmukhyam.*"
Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha, 2001, (Pt. I,) p., 88.

[2] *Poojakah paratattvaatma poojyam tattvam paraaparam I*
Srishtatatvaat aparam tatva jaalam aasanataaspadam II
Tantraaloka by Abhinavagupta, 15, 318.
Also *Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha.* P., 403

4. Padhyam: Padhya: literally means the water with which the feet of the deity, god, or a revered person are washed after inviting him/ her for veneration. Treatises on the Dharma Shastra say that this water must contain five ingredients added to it. These are puffed rice, saffron, leaves of wood-apple tree and a straw of Darbha. [2] Maheshwarananda, a Sanskrit scholar from Varanasi, the author of *Mahartha Manjari Parimala*, writes that Padhyam means the 'Padakodaya' or water meant for washing the feet of a deity, Rishi or manes, as the case may be. The author has repeatedly discussed this fact in his treatise at a number of places.[3]

5. Argyam: Argya means anything that is adorable or valuable. In fact in the process of Poojanam it denotes the water containing eight ingredients like, milk, a straw of Darbha, purified butter, yoghurt, rice grains, some grains of barley and a purified soul for venerating the deity. This mixture called 'Argyam' is a mixture of all these ingredients in water with which the face of the god, deity or a revered person is washed according to the Pooja Paddati of Kashmir.[4] In *Tantraloka*, Aachaarya Abhinava Gupta defines the Argah/ Argya as a mixture of eight elements considered as essential for venerating the deity and this fact has been mentioned by the compilers of

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[1] *Atraakaare chame poojaa ya syath Sadaashivaatmani I*
Lingaadike poojitosmi sadaa poojeti vaasthita I
Poojikah poojinam poojyamiti sarva Shivah sithitah I
Kimetenaatmabhaavena triphtya vaa parapoojanam II
Shiva Drishti by Somananda, 7, 93-95.

[2] *Laajashcha kumkumam chaiva saravoshidhi samanvitam I*
Darbhankuram jalam chaiva panchaangam paadya lakshanam II
Shiva Pooja, by Pt. Keshav Bhatt, Mumbaya Pub., 1925, p. 32.

[3] *Tadukhtam.* ' *Mayaiva shri paadakodaye…….* ' *Mahaartha Manjari Parimalah* , p. 11.., Also *Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosh*, p.392.

[4] *Aapah ksheeram kushaagraani ghritam cha dadhi tandulah I*
Yavah siddhaarthakaashcheti hyargyamashtaangamuchyate II
Shiva Pooja, by Pt. Keshav Bhatt, Mumbaya Pub., 1925, p. 32.

Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha who define Argya as a mixture of eight ingredients as laid down above.[1]

6. Abhishekam: Abhisheka means bathing of the deity or god/ goddess. Acharya Abhinavagupta has described two types of Abhisheks in his treatise *Tantraaloka.* One is held at the time of venerating the god/goddess invited at the Kalasha while holding a Homa or Upa-homa, as the case may be, by the people who are well versed in Mantra, Tantra and Jap. The other is held when a Guru, a preacher or a teacher of repute is elevated to some higher studies or seats of learning, is also classified as Abhishekam.[2]

7. Poojanam:: Poojana means to worship or to adore the deity or god invited on a specific occasion. *Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha* has defined Poojanam as an act of a Yogi who presents himself before a god or a deity with all those things that he deems worth presenting to his invited guest so as to get his/her blessings.[3]

Poojanam includes;

a). Applying saffron or vermilion paste to the deity, known as Tilakam after bathing and offering the Asana, to him/her.

b) Offering followers and rice grains to the deity, known as Argam/ Pushpam,

c). Offering fresh and clean water for rinsing his/her mouth known as Aachamaneeyam,

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[1] *Argah: Poojopayogi dravya ashtakam, Argyadaana poojanagam,*
Yatha: 'Argo ashtangah' - Abhinagupta, *Tantraaloka*,2, 27,
Also; *Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha* , Pt. I., p.(53.)

[2] *..Abhisheka dvai viddhiyam: Kashchith shishyah saadhakatve Abhishichite, Kashchit cha deekshatve I Tato dviprakaaro Abhisheka vidhih I, Yatha*
Sa eva mantrajatigyo japa homaadi tattvavit I
Nirvaanakalashenaadau tat Ishwara sanginaa II
Abhishiktah saadhakah syath bhogaante asya parelayah II
Abhinanagupta, *Tantraaloka* 15, 465-66
Also, Kashmir Shaiva Dharshan Brihad Kosha, Pt. I., p. 48.

[3] *Poojanam:*
Sarva prameya jaatam swaathmataya vimrishan yogee svaathma samvidaatmakaaya Parmeshoraaya Devaaya tat sarvam tatha Vimarshanenaiva yat samarpayati tat tat kritam pujanam I ....
Ibid., Pt. II, p. 403

d). Lighting of the ceremonial Deep with purified butter, Camphor and other scents before the deity, called Rattandeepam, Karpooram, and Dhoopam..

e). Fanning the deity with a whisk (Chaamara) while adoring and respectfully decorating him/her with a parasol called, Chaamaram/Chhatram/ and finally, Adarshanam,- 'showing the looking glass'.

f). Offering various edibles of his/her choice to the deity known as Naivedhyam,

g). Offering fresh water again to the deity to rinse his/her mouth after taking the Naivedhyam called Apooshanam,

h). Presenting of clothing (Na'rivan) to the deity, called Vastram and,

i). Offering some money to the deity called Dakshina,

j). Final departure of the deity from the place of veneration, (Visarjanam).

It may be stated that these are the main steps that a devotee takes while worshipping a deity. No doubt, some slight differences in the over all process of Poojanam do occur occasionally and that is due to some slight differences in the performance of a few rituals. The Kashmir *Shaiva Sutras* clearly state that the Poojanam includes all those ingredients that satisfy the worshipper and he should offer all these ingredients to the deity while worshipping him/her. [1]

8. Tilakam: Tilaka forms the main part of Poojanam. It literally means applying vermilion paste on the forehead of the devotee while venerating the deity, in case the ritual is a Deva Kriya, or any other ritualistic practices. It should be a saffron paste, in case of Pitri Kriya or the Brahamcharis on the occasion of Mekhala. This act of Tilaka has got a special place in all the Pooja practices whether these come under our rites or rituals. It is applied not only to the devotee but also to his family members and to all those who participate in the function. The devotee applies Tilakam to the gods/manes/Rishis and to his Kula Guru while performing their Poojanam. It is considered to be an action of regard to apply Tilakam and, besides the religious books containing the details about the rites and rituals, the Kalasha, the Agni, the two Kshetrapals, the Deepam, the incense, the two metal spoons (Voman Ha'ri') used in offering purified butter etc., to the Agni, the portion of oblation meant for the birds at the time of venerating the Naivedyam, etc., are applied Tilakam This shows that Tilakam and Argam/Pushpam has an important place in all our rites and ritualistic practices.

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[1] *nanda hetu phalair drivyair argha paatram prapoorayeth". J.* Abhinavagupta, *Tantraloka*, 29, 22.

Kashmir Shaiva Dharshan Brihad Kosha, describes Tilakam as 'A centrally written or a circular dot.' [1] Acharya Abhonava Gupta has defined it as 'Tilaka Shastra' [2] Jayaratha, (850 A.D.) in his *Tantraloka Vivekah*, has defined Tilakam as a simple dot [3] In fact he appears to have not found any such particular mention in our Shastras, so he termed it as, 'Tilaka Shastre, Ayam Bhavah'. Thus he says that the 'Shastras confirm Tilaka as a part of the ritual practices.'

According to the procedure set forth by the age old Dharama Shastra and like-wise by the Karama Kanda that cover all the ritual practices adopted and prevalent among all the followers of Hindu Dharma, there are two distinct forms of applying the Tilakam for all devotees without any discrimination. One is to apply it on ones fore-head by ones own self and the other is to get it applied by the Kula Guru who generally heads all such rites and ritual functions held on all auspicious and other occasions. In the former case the Mantra clearly says, " I apply the Tilakam on my own self which is an incarnation of Vishnu also called, Purshotama, the bestowal of all energy, a formation of 'Pancha Maha Bhutas' (water, fire, earth, air and ether), who is confirmed to be the Lord of all Mantras

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[1] .. Tilakam, '*Mandale likhito bindhuh'*
Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha Pt. II, P. 286.

[2] *'Tilaka Shastram': Idaaneem alabhyam kimapi Shastram Ullikhitam Abhinava Guptena. Yatha – Tilaka Shastre ayam bhawah'.*
Ibid., Pt. II P. 286..

[3] *'Tilakam iti bindhu Maatrikam .',*
Jayratha, *Tantraloka Vivekah*, Pt.12 P. 237.

(spells), the highest soul, all perfect Purushotama." [1] A cursory study of this Mantra clearly establishes the presence of the Vedic essence in it that confirms the supremacy of Vishnu, because the Garuda, the Shiva Puranas and the Yajnyavalkya Smriti, the main sources of our ritual practices, clearly write down, "Vyavahare tu Vaidikah", 'in practice one should adopt the Vedic praxis'. In the second case, the Kula Guru while applying Tilakam, recites a number of hymns from various Dharma Granthas that contain good wishes, blessings and prayers for prosperity, etc, for the devotee in a number of ways. All these Shalokas form a part of our Vedas and Upnishads, etc., that govern our rites and rituals. The recitations in both the cases conclude with this addition, "Let the purpose behind all these recitations yield desired results, let all your desires attain fulfillment, let the wisdom of enemies decay and let the number of well- wishers be four fold. May you attain long life, good health and prosperity – and live for a period of hundred full autumns. Let the Savior of the Brahmins guard you" [2] One thing is noteworthy that as per practice, Tilakam is applied with the middle finger known as Madhyama, to all men and women (keeping the Holly Thread round the neck and under the right arm) and it is applied with the thumb of our right hand stretched upside down and keeping our Yajnyopavita round the neck and under the left arm when we apply Tilkam to our manes.

9. Vastram: Vastra or Vasah means cloth or a set of clothes offered to the deity/ god or manes while worshiping them. The Ultimate Divine One is almost unknown to a common devotee. Here the ancient saints and scholars have come to the rescue of the common devotee who describe the Divine as omnipotent (Sarva Shaktiman), omnipresent (Sarvatra Sarva Vyapi), pandemic (Sarva desheeya), omniscient (Sarvajya}, known to every living creature, (Sarvavjya), conversant with every thing, (Sarva Tantra) auspicious every where (Sarvato Bhadra), existing universally, (Sarvato Bhava), all pervading (Sarvato Mukha) and all sovereign (Sarvatha Sarva Adikari). Probably it is because of this very fact that a human being meets his deity or (Aaradhya- the deity whom he worships), in the form of either his Guru or an elder, who is given a divine status while veneration. The Na'rivan, (the wrist band) which also represents Vastrasm, is offered to one and all at the time of performing various rituals including Homa and Upa-homa, whereas no such offer is made at the time of performing rites in the memory of our departed ones. Besides, Na'rivan is tied to the right wrist of the males and unmarried girls; and to the left wrist of married women [1]

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[1] .*Paramaathmane Purushotamaay panchabhutaathmakaay*
Vishvaathmane mantra naathaay, Aathmane Naaraayanaay,
Aadhaara shakte samaalabhannam gandhu namah I
Karama Kanda Deepaka, Ed.,and Pub.,by Premnath Shastri, p.,.8.

[2] *Mantraartha sufala santu poornah santu manorathah, I*
Shatrunaam buddhhi naashastu mitrunaam udhayam bhava II
Aayoraaroogyam aishoryam, iti triteeyam, Jeeva tvam shardah shatam .I
Rakshaanu Brahnaspati II
Karama Kanda Deepaka, Ed.and Pub.,by Premnath Shastri, P.8.

The word 'Na'rivan' is the direct derivation from the Sanskrit word, 'Nadi Bandhan', meaning a wrist band. It has also been named as '*Nila lohitam sutram'* – a reddish blue thread in our scriptures. Besides the religious sanction of using this raw thread for tying the wrist, the act has the sanction of the modern science as well. The health science considers such an act as useful in controlling blood pressure and other heart aliments. Every devotee is eager to get it tied on the wrist at all ritualistic functions after the completion of the Tilakam ceremony.

Besides, this thread is of special importance on our pre-birth ceremony called, Seemantonayana ceremony–(a ceremony that confines a pregnant lady within the limits or the boundaries of the house). It is a pre-birth ritual celebrated after the third month of pregnancy. A small Homa is held and offerings are made to Agni Deva in the form of purified butter and condiments etc. Sprinkling the holy water on the pregnant lady and her husband while reciting hymns from the Holy Scriptures, the Kula Guru sanctifies the husband and the wife on the occasion. Two small sticks of "Sal" or 'Mulberry' tree measuring nearly nine inches, duly sanctified by the Kula Guru are presented by the husband to his wife and after taking the sticks in her hands, she makes cross–marks three times with these sticks on front of her face and then inserts them into the locks of her hair in such a way that her hair is parted into two equal parts. While doing so she takes a solemn oath to behave like a mature and responsible lady and she also pledges to avoid being away from her residential house, especially on all odd hours during her advanced pregnancy. She also weaves her hair into two separate plaits and then she is again offered duly sanctified two Sal/Mulberry sticks along with a thick knot of 'Na'rivan' tied at the ends of both of the sticks. The husband presents the two sticks along with the 'Na'rivan' to his wife who sits to the left side of her husband. The husband binds the hair of the lady into two plaits with this 'Na'rivan' and throws away the sticks. The Dharma Shastra says that tying the hair with the Na'rivan is an act of conferring power to the bearer to accept all the challenges that come in her way during the period of her pregnancy.[1] While reciting from the scriptures, the Kula Guru makes the lady to feel the responsibility of being a mother and she takes this responsibility as a member of the society in general and in the family in particular [2]

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[1] .This concept involves adherence to the ancient Indian thought wherein the Shakti formed half of the body of Shiva. This philosophy is known as "Ardha Nareeshwara" of the *Shaiva Darshan*. Hence every Kashmiri Pandit considers his wife as his *Ardhangini* (the other half of the body) while performing the ritualistic and other practices.

All this appears to be a superstitious exercise now-a-days but the ritual denotes that the lady worked shoulder to shoulder with her husband in the daily chores because debarring her movement during her pregnancy for a short period at odd hours denotes that she was not confined to the four walls of the house but took care of all other responsibilities relating to farming and gardening, etc. Besides it indicated the high respect that a pregnant lady commanded in our society since ancient times. In this connection it may be pointed out that we should also imagine the festive occasion for the family when such a good news was disclosed to its members in those days when natural calamities like, disease, death, floods, famines and starvations would annihilate a good number of densely populated areas in the twinkling of an eye especially the new born ones. The occasion must have been worth celebrating. Utmost care was taken for the safety of the pregnant lady. She was not allowed to perform strenuous family chores and every body in the family was helpful to her. Any stranger or a person, who entered the house late or at odd hours, was not allowed to approach close to this lady directly. Though there were no hard and fast rules for the purpose, yet the ritual has survived in our society to this day.

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[1] *Neela lohitena sutrena keŝhaan granthayeti, Neela lohitam bhawati kritya shakter vyajyate Edhante asya jyatayah patir bandheshu badhyataam II Mekhala PustakPustak*, Ed. by Pt. Keshav Bhatta, Chapt., *Upanayan*, p., 39.

[2] *Yo Gurustam arhayet etadeva kumaareenaam saddoddhranam antraiva aanava lobhanam. I*
Mekhala Pustak, Ed. By Pt. Keshav Bhatta, Chapt., *Upanayan*, p., 39.

In order to indicate that the lady had a special position in the family, a piece of brocade, a kind of a special, bright and glittering gold/silver cloth, commonly known as, 'Zarbaph' folded into a tri-angular pouch and filled with a few seeds of sesame and lime powder was stitched to her head-gear commonly known as 'Kalpush' or fastened to her hair locks. This social function resembles our ritual known as "Na'rivan Khaara'ni'", now held on the 'Yajnyopavita' ceremony. The lady thus dressed in a spectacular way welcomes the guests so that every newcomer to the house identifies her from a distance and conduct him/herself according to the set procedure. This act of special position given to the lady on such social and religious gatherings is self explanatory as far as the position of women in ancient Indian society is concerned. Besides, this Sanskar, though clubbed with the Yajnyopavita Sanskar, appears to have been of much importance in the society that explains its survival till date. It cannot, however, be denied that there has occurred some gradual slackness in the performance of this ritual at the scheduled date but still its social, ethical and religious significance has remained un-changed and it is still being observed at the time of the Yajnyopavita ceremony.

It may not be out of place to mention here that our ancient Dharma Shastra has laid much stress on subduing our six enemies known as "Shadripu". These are; 1.Kama, (lust), 2. Krodha, (anger), 3. Lobha, (greed), 4. Moha, (infatuation), 5. Mada, (arrogance) and 6. Ahankara (pride). It has also been emphasized to keep our respiration in control through Pranayama and other means because all these self born enemies affect our respiration and compel us to work abnormally. *Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha* has defined human body more scientifically and lucidly. It says that 'there exists an endless network of nerves in the human body as in the leaf of a Banyan tree.[1] To keep all the nerves of the human body in proper order and control, the propounders of Shaiva Shastra have advocated tying of the wrist with the soft thread that we call 'Nadi Bandhan' or Na'rivan. Jayarath has called it 'Nadikah Sutrani' in his famous treatise *Tantraloka Vivek.*[2] He has defined it as a special kind of thread that is used for tying the wrist in general. In *Tantraloka*, Acharya Abhinanagupta has described even the measurements and the days of the week for tying such knots on the wrists of the devotees. It says that "A Nadika (Na'rivan) of a specific measure in length should be worn on various auspicious occasions after wetting it in the holy water on the eve of some Yajnya or on an auspicious day.[3] Presently tying of the Na'rivan at a number of gatherings like the birth day ceremony, Shiva Ratri, Pan dyun – on Ganesha Chaturthi, and at a number of similar such occasions celebrated by the Hindus all over the sub-continent, is very common. 'It should be thirty one finger tips in length made three fold and the thread thus twisted, has the power to streamline the crooked motion of a beast, not to speak of a man,' affirm the Shastras.[4] The Shaiva philosopher, Aachaarya Abhinava Gupta, while commenting on the make, etc., of the Na'rivan, has used authoritative words that tell us that tying of a

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[1] *Yathavat Plashaadi patre tantu jalapam vyapakam,*
Tathaiva shareereshuapi naadi jalakam II
Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha , Pt. II., p. 337.

[2] *Mandalay nyastaah sutra visheshaah, yathaa- Nadikaah Sutraani*
Tantaaloka Viveka by Jayarath,Pt. 12, p.285.
Also. The *Kashmir Darshan Brihad Kosha* Pt II, p., 337

[3] . (1)*Yajya kriya visheshah I Mantra Kalasha jalena granther bhedana vidhi* I
Kriya vjjyana videva samyak vijaaneeyur idrishaan vishiyan II
Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha Pt II, p., 337

[4] . *Naadikah sthaapayeth poorvam mahurtam parimaanatah II*
Shakravaarundiksthaascha yamyasaumya gataastathaa II
Ekonatrimshaddhamshaah syur riju tiryaggataastathaa II
Tantraaloka, by Abhinavagupta, 31, 131-33.

Na'rivan gives a sense of restraint and detachment from the worldly worries to the wearer.

After imparting Tilakam to ones own self or to the devotee by the Kula Guru, this wrist band is tied to the right wrist of a man and an unmarried girl and to the left one of a female married woman. The Mantra quoted from the scriptures, besides wishing betterment for the wearer, also says, "When tied by a learned one among hundreds, it blossoms our feelings like a flower and increases many fold the efficiency of even an animal not to speak of a devotee with a blessed heart. May the Lord of the Lords protect all of us" [1] In this way the devotee is now fully prepared to take up the veneration (Poojanam) of his /her deity. In fact, these are the pre-requisites for a devotee to prepare his/her own self before proceeding further for 'Poojanam'. It is from here that the variegated ways of worshipping different deities starts.

There is a cluster of temples all around where the worship of one deity or the other, god/ goddess, as the case may be, is performed by the devotees and the architectural design of the structure of these temples generally enables us to judge the deity it houses even from a long distance because of its characteristic and architectural peculiarities. One thing is common that a devotee worships the deity of his/her choice in all such shrines provided it does not create any kind of inconvenience for others attending these temples for 'Poojanam'. Even in our homes we venerate a number of gods and deities on various occasions of worship and we give first preference to Lord Ganesha, as the Adi Deva, the first deity to be worshipped on all such occasions. There is no denying the fact that our scriptures have provisions for the veneration of even a single deity and our great Rishis and Saints have composed the Sahasranams for a number of such deities/gods and goddesses. After worshipping Ganesha, the devotee worships Vishnu, the overseer of all our activities as Parameshvara and then follows veneration of all other gods and deities.

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[1] . *Yadaa bandhana daakshyayanaa sumanasyamaanah I*
Aabadnena Shatashaaradaaya dvipade chatushpade Rakshaanu
Brahamnaspati. II
[illegible], Ed. by Pt. Keshav Bhatta, Chapt., *Upanayan*, p.,17.

10. Visarjanam/ Vikirnam: After completing the Poojanam to ones own satisfaction and as directed in the scriptures, final departure of the deity from the place of veneration is made by the devotee with folded handed and the deity and other gods invited on the occasion are given farewell with utmost respect and care and they retreat to their heavenly abodes. It is also known as Vikirnam.

In the foregoing pages an attempt has been made to elaborate the essentials of the process of Poojanam. In order to appraise the readers of the practical details involved in Poojanam, an attempt is being made in these pages to discuss in detail the process to be adopted by a devotee while performing the Birthday Poojanam held on the annual birthdays which is followed by short sketch of the steps to be followed on the performance of the Shraaddha of our manes and the practices involved in it that keep the community in the Hindu fold by following such celebration.

I. Janam Din

Birthday Poojanam

Janam Din (Birthday) is a day of special celebrations for all of us and we call it Woharvo'd – the annual day worth knowing, in the Kashmiri language. It is a special and the most significant occasion of ritualistic practices prevalent among Kashmiri Hindus all over the world and it includes wearing of a fresh Yajnyopavita, on this occasion after duly venerating it and also performing the 'Zang' ceremony. A host of gods and goddesses as contained in the Naiveda recitation (Mantra) called "Prepyun", are venerated but the main thrust is given to the worship of the below mentioned seven luminaries of pre-historic and mythological past who, being masters in their respective fields of knowledge, are considered to have attained immortality (Chirajiva), through God's grace for their adherence to the 'Karma' theory and hence they are specially venerated on this occasion [1]:

1. Ashwathama: The great hero of the epic, the Mahabharata, son of Dronacharya, the teacher of the Kauravas and the Pandavas whom Drishtadyumana killed treacherously.
2. Bali: The famous charitable Rakshasa king, the great grand son of Bhakta Prehlada. He had conquered the three worlds with his penance and was betrayed by Lord Vishnu in the guise of a dwarf old Brahman (Vamana) asking for a donation of land equal to the three measures of His steps and thus He betrayed him by taking back all the three worlds (in three foot steps), lest he should become too powerful for Devas to conquer them.
3. Vyasa: The great Rishi mentioned with reverence in most of our Puranas as Veda Vyasa, the originator of the Vedas, who is also considered as the first teacher entitled to the Vyasa Peetha. He is known to be the author of the great epic the Mahabharata .as well.
4. Hanumana: Who is considered as the "Vanara Raja", Lord of the

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[1] *Ashwathaamni Balayi, Vyasaayi, Hanumataye, Kripaachaaryaye, Maarkandiyaye, Parushuraamaaye safta chira jeevebyh ……….II*
Vijayeshwar Panchaang, Ed., O.N.Shastri,year 2009-10, p.139

monkeys and a staunch follower of Lord Ram of the great epic, the Ramayana.

5. Kripacharya : Kula Guru of the 'Pandavas' and the Kauravas.
6. Markandeya, The great Rishi who is known to have authored the 'Markandeya Purana' He attained immortality as a result of his penance.
7. Parshurama: Known to be a staunch opponent of the Kshetriyas. He is the son of Jamad Agni, the great Rishi who framed and streamlined the Karma Kanda - the book of religious rites. Parshurama annihilated the Kshetriyas from the world 21 times as is written in various Puranas including the Nilamata Purana for they had betrayed him by killing his father treacherously.[1]

The veneration of all these mythological luminaries who remained staunch followers of Karma (action) throughout their lives amply depicts the Karma theory followed by the Indians throughout their life. Hence the Janam Din Pooja appears to be a remembrance of the Karma theory.

After venerating the Na'rivan having seven knots depicting all these mythological luminaries as per the details already discussed,{in case of males alone) the Prepyun starts while holding the Thali containing rice cooked in turmeric water, Kheer, sweet puddings or both, as the case may be, with both our hands. The Naiveda Mantra, as contained in a number of our Panchangs published every year, is concluded with the following recitations:

"In the past the Heavenly Nectar emerged from churning the waters of Ksheer Sagara (by the gods and the demons together), and I take this left over from the venerated food as "Naived" like the 'Nectar', derived from churning the Ksheer Sagara"[2] After tying the Na'rivan to the person or to the couple (in case he is married), the oblation is offered to one and all present on the occasion.

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[1] *Puraa pitri vadhaadarchaam Raamah Kshetriya mardanah I*
Trisaftakritvah prithiveem kritva nih Kshitriyam puraa II
Nialmata Purana, v., 1212.

[2] . *Utpannam Amritam divyam praak Ksheerodadhi manthanaat I*
Annam Amrita rupena Naivedyam prati grahitam II
(*Naivda Mantram*). *Karma kaanda Deepaka*, Ed., by Premnath Shastri, p. 21.

II. Morning Worship

(SANDHYA)

Morning, known as 'Prabhat' to the common Indian, is derived from the root word 'Prabha' meaning light, luster or radiance. This particular time is the beginning of the day and hence the commencement of life and action for every creature. Have we ever seen a small bird or a starling (Maina) in the morning rubbing its tender beak on the soft and tiny feathers of her beautiful neck, a crow rubbing its stiff and hard beak on the dried branch of a tree, or a cat rubbing its face tenderly with its paws? Morning is the time of waking up for all creatures including human beings and preparing our self for the activities of the day.

According to our scriptures a man should rise up from the bed in the last quarter of the night, called the 'Brahmi Mahurata', 'the auspicious time of gods.' By doing so, one gets ample time to spend in the worship of the Almighty after relieving oneself and after cleaning and bathing. We have been advised to look at our both hands first in the morning and kiss them with reverence and then leave the bed for other jobs. The scriptures consider a persons' hands to be the means to control his all fortune, blessing and wealth. It says emphatically that 'the goddess of Wealth (Lakshmi) resides on the fingertips of a man, the abode of goddess Sarasvati is in the middle of the palms of the hand and Lord Govinda (Vishnu) is seated on the base (wrist) of our hands. [1] This once again lays emphasis on the age-old theory of Karma, believed by the Hindus of the sub-continent.

The word 'Sandhya' means conjunction of 'day and night'. It also means the "bathing code" as '*Shran Sandhya*' or the '*Snana/Sandhya Vidhi*". Besides, it literally means 'conjunction of day and night ', or "twilight." It can either be in the morning time when the dawn begins and the night ends, called the '*Brahmi Mahurata*; or in the evening when the day comes to an end and the darkness of the night just starts, named as the 'Sandhya Kal'.

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[1] *Karaagre vasti Lakshmi kara madhye Sarasvati I*
Kara mule tu Govinda prabhaate kara darshane II
Vijeshwar Panchang, 19004-05, p.9.

Our scriptures have given much importance to the worship at such twilight periods during every morning and evening. It is said that if one sticks to the worship practices at the "*Sandhya*' times, one is relieved from his sinful life and attains the eternal bliss of Brahma Loka (final liberation) [1] provided one keeps away from sinful life in future. The Trika Shaiva philosophy defines "*Sandhyopasana*" as the learning imparted to a disciple at a very young age at the time of his Yajnyopavita Sanskara. *Tantraloka* by Abhinavagupta includes the following seven pre-requisites for a Brahmachari for a period of twenty-five years or till he enters into the phase of the family life and performance of *Sandhya* prayers is one among them. These are: 1, a waist band, (Mekhala), 2, a staff, (Dandam), 3, the hide of an antelope/tiger as a sitting rug (Ajinah), 4; observance of these during the three stages of human life (childhood, youth and at the advanced age) known as, '*Trayush*'- the three *Vritas* (vows) that bestow long life, 5.worshipping the Holy Fire, (*Vahni Upasana*), 6, the morning and the evening worship (*Sandhya*), and 7., 'belief in the Final Destruction of this universe, (*Abhiksheti*).[2]

Everyman has to attend the call of nature after he gets up in the morning. The scriptures have clearly laid the codes for all human activities including the one under discussion. These codes forbid defecating or urinating in the open and on the naked soil. It directs to do it on the grassy land in case there is no alternative. Preference has been given to pit like places for such purposes, if latrines/bath rooms and urinals are not available. It has further been laid down to keep quite while relieving oneself and keep the Yajnyopavita on the right ear till it is over. It should immediately be followed by the process of purification of one's own self. The scriptures lay much stress on thoroughly cleaning and washing the excretory parts of the body. The soil used for the purpose should neither be wet nor the one used and left over by others. The scriptures also forbid the use of soil dug out by rats or ants. It is in clear terms forbidden to use the soil extracted from the wall of a house or a boundary wall. However, use of fresh ashes for the purpose has been advocated.[1] Perhaps, this is the main reason that why fresh ashes were in commonly used by the people till recently to dry wash the bronze and other metal utensils in Kashmir. The Mekhala Pustak contains a vivid description regarding place and directions for relieving one self and the cleaning codes.

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[1] *Sandhyayam upaasate yetu satatam samshita vritaah I*
Vidirit paapaaste yanti Brahamlokam sanatanam II
Vijeshwar Panchang, Ed. O.N.Shastri, year, 2004-05, p., 156.

[2] .Sandhyopasana,: *Trikaachaare samayadeekshya vidhau ye sanskaarah teshu sandhyapi pariganitaa* I

Yatha –

Mekhalaa dandamajin traayushe vahnyuupaasanam I
Sandhya abhiksheti sanskaaraah saphtasaphta vritaani cha II

Tantraaloka by Abhnavagupta, 15, 506.

Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha, Pt. II, p. 738.

Needless to say the bleaching powders and various types of soaps available at present, have taken the place of all such cleaning materials. Besides, the construction of modern toilets and bathrooms, have added to our comforts of daily life and we have discarded all the old practices in vogue till date.

After urination and defecation, a person has been advised not to touch ones' head or the other upper parts of his/her body until he/she cleans his/her hands and the concerned parts of the body. Stress has been laid on washing the concerned parts of the body once after urination and three times after defecation. The left hand is to be washed ten times and both the hands are to be washed with soil/soap seven times after defecation. Brown soil is advised for the Brahmins, red soil for Kshetriyas, blue soil for Vaishas and black soil for women and all other castes. This sort of cleaning has been advised for a men with families. The Brahamcharis and Sannyasins have to complete these formalities three times more and an ascetic four times.[2] All these details impress upon us to always strictly maintain cleanliness of the whole body.

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[1] *Mekhala Pustak*. edited by Pandit Keshav Bhatt, year 1925 '*Upavanam*' p p.. 71-72

[2] Ibid. p 72.

It is followed by washing of the face and next we take a bath preferably in a river/ pond/stream or at an ordinary water tap. It may be pointed out that stress has been laid on using fresh running water for the purpose. At the same time it has been clarified that after lifting and throwing back the stored water in a vessel three times in the open or in sunshine, makes the water free from all impurities and it also becomes as good as the fresh water. This type of concession is granted where running water is not available. After relieving and cleaning hands a person has been advised to clean his/her teeth and mouth with "Dantun", a fibrous twig. The Vedas have appreciated such herbal cleaning material for our teeth and it is said to be a giver of health, wealth, fame, and wisdom.[1] At water spot or on a running water stream, the process of Sandhya starts with washing one's hands and feet first and then the face. In this connection the Vedas and other scriptures describe the following process.

The left foot of a man is considered as "Ananta,", the famous Nag Chief with one thousand heads. It also means Lord Vishnu. While washing it one pays salutations to Ananta with thousand faces, feet, eyes, heads, and arms, who is the sustainer of the Yugas, since the beginning of times.[2] The scriptures direct that the right foot has the same place in the human body as has the lotus eyed Vishnu among the gods who is also named as Keshava, Ananta or Vasudeva in scriptures. Seated on the palanquin of water, salutations are paid unto Him while washing the right foot. The scriptures consider it as good as worshipping god Ananta.[3] In this way the supremacy of the devotee as the Amrit Putra is once again established.

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[1] *Ayurbalam yasho varchah Pajaapatirvasuni cha I*
Brahama pragyam cha medham cha tvam no dehi vanaspati II
Nityakarma Vidhih, Ed. & Pub., Vijayeshwar Karyalaya, Bijbihara, Kashmir, p., 9.

[2] *Namostu Anantaayi sahasra murtaye,*
Sahasra paadaakshishirorubaahave I
Sahasranaamne purushaaya shaashvate,
Sahasra koti yaga dhaarine namah II
Ibid., P. 9.

[3] Om namah Kamalanaabhaaye namastye jalashaayine I
Namaste Keshvaananta Vaasudeva namostute II
Ibid., P. 9.

(Note: In the case of ladies, the scriptures mention clearly that while washing the feet of their husbands, they should start the process from the right foot. A man has been directed to wash his left foot first in case he washes it himself and at the time of venerating her husband or washing his feet, the woman has to start it with the right one. She has to initiate it from the left one if she washes her own feet).

For washing ones mouth, a devotee takes fresh water in the right palm and he has to imagine it to be the water from a number of holy Tirthas of the sub-continent like, the Ganga, Prayaga, Gaya, Pushkara, etc. He has to regard it as a blessing from god Hari on this earth, and he should also imagine that all these Tirthas have assembled within the water held by him in his palm, with which the devotee has been directed to wash his/her face. While washing the face with this water he should pray: "Let this water be as good as wished by me and as described in the scriptures; let the possessor of the Brahmins save all parts of my body, internally and externally including the complexion of my skin and body and streamline the actions of my mind. Let my soul get the right direction with the help of this water.[1] The scriptures have thus held the sanctity of water so high.

We have also been advised to wash the holy Thread daily with fresh and clean water. Placing the Yajnyopavita in the thumbs of the two hands we wash it three times reciting the Vedic hymn known as, 'Gayatri Mantra', [2] The Mantra, which is to be recited three times at the time of washing the Yajnyopavita says:-

"Om, (the first or the seed sound) that existed on this earth, atmosphere and beyond that, was received by Shiva from Savita (the Sun) in the form of Gayatri (the Ganga) and who then bestowed it on us. This source of Knowledge may give all of us strength and vigour to bear it." After washing the 'Yajnyopavita' with fresh water, we wear it while reciting the Vedic 'Mantra' that says:-

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[1] . *Gangaa Preyaga Gayanai mishi Pushkaraadi,*
Ttirthani yani bhuvisanti Hariprasaadaat I
Aayantu taani karapadmapute madeeye,
Pprakshaalayantu vadnasya nishakalakm II
Tirthesneyam tirthameva samaanaanam bhavati, manah, *shamshyu*
ururusho dhurtih praanaangartasya, rakshaanu Brahamaspati I
Vijeshwar Panchang, Ed. O.N.Shastri, year, 2004-05, p., 9-10.

[2] *Om Gayatrai namah, Om Bhoor Bhuvah Swah tat Savitor varenyam bhargo devasya dhimahi dhiyo yonah prachodayat* I (3).
Ibid. , p., 10.

'The Sacred Thread which is most auspicious of all things that in the past Prajapati (the Lord of Creation, the Eternal Brahma) has so kindly bestowed on us so honourably in the presence of the Sacred Fire in the beginning of this universe and the wearing of which has added to our life span and revealed and opened on us the doors of light and learning. This is the bestowal of prosperity, strength and magnificence. I wear this Holy Thread out of my own will and choice, the wearing of which has been authenticated by the Holy Fire.[1]

After wearing the Holy Thread, we are advised to take a bath. It has been advised that we have at least three dips if the bath is taken in a stream or in a pond, etc. Great importance has been given in our scriptures to bathing with fresh water excepting the Last Bath, which necessarily is to be given to the departed one with lukewarm water. It is said that life of a person begins with bathing and it ends with the 'Final Bath.' The Shakta School of thought defines that the body structure of a man requires a natural cleaning processes, time and again, in the form of daily baths and it has been classified as Snanam in our scriptures.[2] Acharya Somananda has further elucidated this fact in his book *Shiva Drishti* by confirming that a dirty (un-clean) man neither deserves any Moksha (final liberation) nor does he achieve any position of honour while living on this earth. In order to purify one's self, the first step towards this direction is known as Snanam (bathing).[3]

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[1] *Yagnyopaveetam paramam pavitram, Prajaapateryat sahajam purastat, I*
Aayosham agryam pratimuncha shubhram yajnyo-pavetam balamastu tejah I
Yahnyopavetamasi yajnysetva upvetena upanahyami II
Vijeshwar Panchang, Ed. O.N.Shastri, year, 2004-05, p.10.

[2] *Aathmanah swabhaaviksya shuddhatvasya punah punah vimarshanasya – abhyasah snaanam.*
Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha , Pt. II., p.787.

[3] *Na me bandho na me mokshastau malatvena sansthitau II*
Pratipattyanaya snaanam nirmaleekarnam matam I
Somasnanda. *Shiva Drishti*, 7, 87-88

Kashmir Shaiva Darshan has given quite a different meaning of the word, "Snanam.". It states that the pure-hearted devotee whose thoughts are free from all adulteration, and who dives deep in the pure and pleasure-giving sea of Eternal Pleasure, is the real and the perfect honour (Snanam) for a Shiva Yogi. In other words it is a clear amalgamation of both.[1] The Agama Shastra defines Snanam in a different way. It says that the pressing desire for the eternal freedom and the joy for their own self is the goal to be attained by all the devotees/seekers and it urges upon them to undergo the process of Snanam (bathing) for the satisfaction of their own self. [2]

A number of exercises are associated with our body called, (*Anga Nyasa*) and respiration called, (*Pranayama*). A devotee initiates all these practices to purify his inner self, which is necessary for the union of the self with the Universal Soul. Actually '*Pran*' means 'air' and '*Ayam*' means, 'incoming and outgoing.' In fact *Pranayam* means inflow and outflow of respiration. This practice is done with meditation. Scientifically too all these exercises are considered as stimulants to good health.

Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha defines Nyasa as an imaginary action for spreading of the letters of a Mantra on the parts of the body of a devotee. It is an imaginative unification with the deity of a particular Mantra through the touch of ones finger tips, etc. Acharya Abhinavagupta has defined various types of Anga Nyasas more lucidly in his *Tantraloka.* [3] Pantanjali's definition of *Pranayama* is to concentrate on a single point, that we call (*Bindu*) which is also called *Shunya* in the philosophical idiom. He is of the opinion that there are a number of measures that a devotee can adopt while acquiring control over his breath through *Pranavayu* in the form of:

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[1] *Paaramaishoryananda samudrakalpe shuddhe chidroopatve*
jeevabhaavasya yannimajanam tadeva Shiva Yoginah snanam I
Tat cha samaavesha iti paribhaashyate I
Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha , Pt. II., p.787.

[2] Yatha: *Svantantraanandachinmaatrasaarah svaatmaa hi sarvatah* I
Aaveshnam tat svaroope svaathmanah snaanameeritam II
Vijyaana Bhairva, 152.

[3] *Mantraaksharanaam shareeraangeshu bhavanaya sthapanam I*
Mantradevatasvaathmanaam trayànaam Bhaavanayaikeekarara-
naayaanagtaam [illegible] staadikarma II
Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha , Pt. II., p.354.

1). *Pooraka* (the air that is inhaled),
2).*Kumbhaka* (holding of the breath for some moments) and,
3).*Rechaka*, (the breath that is exhaled).

All the three processes done in a phased manner is called *Pranayam...*[1] It is a fact that Kashmir Shaiva Darshan has rejected the practice of *Pranayama* in case it becomes an act of torturing ones body. It is because of this very fact that Acharya Abhinavagupta considers it, as an undesirable practice in *Tantraloka* [2].

Before offering water to the deities and gods, we have been advised to splash the face and the feet of our body with the Holy Water drops consecrated with the Vedic Hymn: *Tirthisniyam .... Brahamanaspati* (see Richa on p. 397 fn.1 last two lines).

While chanting the hymns from the scriptures we, first of all, offer three handfuls of water to the Sun, who is the embodiment of Dharma, creator of the upper worlds and a living deity in the form of Fire God (*Pratyaksha Deva*), on this earth. [3]

Keeping the Holly Thread round under the right arm, water is offered to all those who live in the unknown destinations in the infinite higher worlds situated beyond the reach of all human beings where even the light of the Sun, the Moon or the stars does not reach and one can not judge whether it is day or night there. The hymn confirms that there is none of our parents or any of our relatives in those heights. The devotee makes a solemn submission before the Almighty that he is offering this water to all of them through 'Narayana' himself.[1] The scriptures have defined it as *Tarpanam,* (offering water).The *Samaya Deekshavidhi* of *Tantraloka* a treatise on Kashmir Shaiva Darshan defines eight kinds of people who are entitled to such offerings that we call, *Tarpanam*. These are the people who are worthy of getting such protection so that they survive around us and thus form a part of our society These consist of the poor, the physically challenged, the manes, the tillers and the people associated with them, birds, the dwellers at the cremation grounds, and the deities who get a share from the water offered to them as *Tarpanam*.[2]

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[1] *Praanaayamah: - Paatanjalah: Pooraka Rechaka Kumbhaka abhyasa visheshaih praanavaayorniyantrana abhyaaso aneka prakaarakah* I
Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha , Pt. II., p.435.

[2] "*Praanaayaamo na kartavyah shareeram yena peedayate*" I
Tantraloka by Abhinavagupta, 4, 91.

[3] *Namo Dharma nidhanaye namah swakritasaakshine, I*
Namah pritiksha devaaya Shri Bhaaskaraayanamo namah II
Shiva Puja Ed.by Pt. Keshav Bhatt, Bombay, 1925, p.30.

While keeping the Holy Thread round the left arm, called (Apasavena), water is offered to our manes who are in their heavenly abodes. The offer starts with the humble submission of saluting the manes who have attained salvation, such of our manes who have not yet attained salvation, to the protector of the Dharma-Vishnu, to Yama, Rudra and to those who dwell in deep forests.[3] After reciting the date and the day according to the lunar calendar (details given at Addenda III, p.429) and the 'Gotra' of the departed ones, for three generations on the father's and three generations on the mother's/grand mother's (paternal) side, three generations on the maternal grand –father's and three generations on the grand mother's (maternal) side, thus making a total of twelve of our ancestors. Besides, we consider it our obligation to offer water to other manes that were related to us and are now in heaven and we also offer water to our teachers and well wishers. In this way the total number of our manes comes to twelve excluding our teachers and other well-wishers, etc., to whom we offer *Tarpanam,* (water). .[1]

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[1] *Yatrasti maata na pitaa na bandhu braatah punah yatra suhird janah cha I*
Na jyayite yatra dinam naraatri tatraapi dveepam sharnam prapadhe II
Aathmani Naaraayanaaya aadhaara shaktyai deepa dhoopa
sankalpaah siddhirastu, deepu namah dhoopo namah II
Karma Kanda Deepaka, Ed., Premnath Shastri, p. 8.

[2] *Tarpanam: Deenaadeenaam ashataanaam tarpyanaam triphtikaranam I*
Deenaan klishtaan pitrin kshetrapaalaan praaniganaan khagaan I
Shamshaanikam bhutaganam dehideveeshcha tarpayeth II
Ex. from Devi-yamala, Tantraaloka, 15, 527-28.
Also;Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha , Pt. II., p.283.

[3] *Namah pitribhyah pretebhyu, namo dharmaaya Vaishnave I*
Namo Yamaayi Rudraaya Kaantaarapataye namah II
Karma Kanda Deepaka, Ed., Premnath Shastri, p. 8-9.

In addition to this, the offering of water to the manes is concluded with the words, 'all those deceased mothers and fathers numbering twelve and all the ancestors from the family tree, may get bliss of eternal satisfaction through this water offered to them on this occasion'. [2]

At the conclusion of the Sandhya final salutation are offered to the gods/deities, Rishis and the manes. The gods and other deities are offered water over the front part of the fingertips of the right hand with the Holy Thread kept round under the right arm, called (Saveena) while reciting, "*Namo Devebhyah*", (salutations be to the gods). The scriptures direct that the offerings to the Rishis be made through the palms of both the hands while keeping the 'Yajnyopavita' round the neck and in between the two thumbs and the index finger of the hands, called (Kanthopavite), while reciting: *Swaha Rishibyah* (let this offering reach the Rishis). Again water is offered to all other manes in general, keeping the Holy Thread round under the left arm. (Apasaveena).reciting: Svadhah Pitribyah: (offerings for the manes). We can summaries this process in the following words while wearing the Holy Thread in different ways:

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[1] .Om, tat sat Brahma adhya taavat tithau adhya ……Masasya (name of the month pakshsasya (name of the fortnight),…….(name of the Tithi).. parta (the name of next Tithi if the tithi is Deva–extended over two meridians)……Vaasaraanitaayam, (the name of the day) 1.Pitaa …… (Father's name with Gotra), 2. Pitaamaha ……… (Grandfather's name with Gotra),3, Prapitaamaha ………(.Great Grandfather's name with Gotra);.4. Maataa……., (Mother's name) Ttsamaana …. . . (her name at her parental house.) Devi ……(her Gotra at her in-laws house), 5. Pitaamahee … … (Grandmother's name) Ttsamaana …… (her name at her parental house) Devi …… (her Gotra at her in-laws house), 6., Prapitaamahee ……_ (Great-grandmother's name) Ttsamaana …… (her name at her parental house) Devi….. (her Gotra at her in-laws house), 7. Maataamaha ….(name and Gotra of the grandfather from the maternal side), 8. Pramaataamaha (name and Gotra of the great grand father from the maternal side), Vriddha Pramaataamaha. ….. ……(name and Gotra of the great great-grand father from the maternal side); 10. Maataamahee ….. …name of the grand-mother from the maternal side) Tsamaana ……… (her name at her parental house) Devi….(her Gotra at her in-laws house) 11.Pramaataamahee…..(name of the great grandmother) Tsamaana ………(her name from her parental side) Devi ………. (her Gotra at her in-laws side) 12. Vriddha Pramaataamahee…. (name of the great great-grand mother from the maternal side) Tsamaana … (her name at her parental house) Devi……(her Gotra at her in-laws house;),

Karma Kaanddi Part II, Ed. by Jyotshi, Kesho Pandit, in the year 1933, pp. 7- 8.

[2] *Samasta maatah pitribyah dwaadasha devebyah pitribyah swadha namah trapitaam.(3).*

Ibid., p.8.

1. Gods, while keeping the Holy Thread in Saveena position (round under the right arm);
2. Our Rishis, and teachers, keeping the Holy Tread round the neck and in between the two thumbs and the index fingers of our both hands (Kanthopaveti) position; and
3. Our manes, keeping the Holy Thread round under the left arm in the Apasaveena position .[1]

We conclude our Sandhya ritual with the words. "I pay my salutations to Yama, Dharmaraja and the saviour of the Sun, the Moon and the stars - the main sources of light, this whole universe with its animate and inanimate phenomena. May all get satisfaction through the water offered to them at this moment [2]".

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[1] *(Saveena), Namo Devebyah, (Kanthopaveete) Svaahha Rishibyah, (Apasaveena) Svodah Pitribyah*
Karma Kaandi, Part II, Ed. by Jyotshi, Kesho Pandit, year 1933,p.16.

[2] *(Saveena), Yamaaye Dharmaraajaaye Kaantaara pataye namah, Aa Brahmaandam sat charaacharam jagat tripitam, jagat Tripitam jagat tripitam, evam astu..*
Karma Kaandi, Part II, Ed. by Jyotshi, Kesho Pandit, year 1933,p.16

III. REMEMBRING OUR MANES (SHRAADDHAM)

There are a number of words in Kashmiri language in vogue like, 'Marun', 'Mrityu', Sorgas gatsun', etc., for death of a man. With the passage of time some of these words have retained the original Sanskrit form while others have undergone slight phonetic changes. We often think that the dying person loses in a single moment this whole world, his body, home, job, house, his relatives - every thing that he thought belonged to him just a few moments back. All the losses that could not possibly be experienced in one's whole life happen together and one loses everything when one dies. So a man does some pre-meditating and even preparations so as to keep himself ready for meeting his death, which is every body's ultimate lot. It is because of this very fact that a man considers death to be always following him like his shadow.

Scholars have described five stages in the process of coming to terms with death. These are generally known as, denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. In the prime of youth every body denies the existence of death. But with the advancement of age, the other stages follow. Of course, it is not necessary for every body to go through all these stages. For some people the road to the acceptance of death as a reality may be too long and full of hurdles and thorns whereas some of us may not even reach to that stage of acceptance at all. Indian culture is full of beliefs, rites, rituals, and superstitions, which cannot be understood unless we place them against a right perspective. People who accept this natural phenomenon like a natural change - face death as a challenge. But some people feel as if having been cheated of their life, so consequently, they feel frustrated and angry. We should try to ask the dying person to consider death as a natural process. Repressed emotions, sadness, numbness, guilt and jealousy may develop on this occasion in those who are about to die. We should help the dying man not to suppress these emotions when these overwhelm him at this crucial hour. The emotions slowly subside and the dying man experiences serenity, calmness and sanity. We should remain with the dying man as long as we can. Sometimes a dying man knows far better than any one else as to how he can be helped, and a person should know how to draw on his wisdom and let him give us what he knows better than we do. On a higher spiritual level, the dying person has clear intellect whether he realizes it or not and the dying man has a potential for complete enlightenment. As the dying man comes closer to death, this possibility increases manifold and in many ways. So the dying man deserves more care and respect. Death is an eternal fact and it comes at the appointed hour. It can come slowly due to disease or due to old age or swiftly due to some accident or violence. Whatever would have been the life and the deeds of a person but one thing is sure that the moment he dies, he becomes practically an angel of goodness. Actually casting off physical body no more alters soul's disposition than does the casting off one's clothes alter one's presence. The scriptures say that the stay of a person in the astral world depends on the intensity of his lower desires and emotions during his physical existence in this world. Once this intensity is exhausted only then can he leave for the higher and more peaceful realms of the higher worlds. Though the passions of the dying person are, for the time being, weakened or become meaningless for him at this stage, but the impression of the desires, wishes, etc., that have remained unfulfilled in this world, are still there. They are latent but ineffective. After his death he leaves for the astral world and those wishes and desires can no longer find expression. Such wishes, therefore, remain latent, but when a long long time later, on his downward course into a rebirth, as we Hindus believe, he re-enters the realms of this world and these desires manifest themselves in him once again and these become the blue print of his next cycle of life.

The destination of the soul after death depends on how one shapes once ideas about it throughout ones life in this world. If we carefully consider this, we can understand how our consciousness, at any given moment of time, directly determines our next destination in space. It is because of this very fact that we have a popular notion '*Anta mati sa eva gati*' 'the last thoughts are a gateway to the new realms'. This consciousness has many contents and all these develop or take shape according to our association and activities in the astral world.

The three humours of human body physiologically are named as 'Tridosh'. These are: - 1. Bile, called 'Pitta' 2. Wind, called 'Vat/ air', and 3. Phlegm, called 'Kaf'. These are the three essential elements of our physical body provided these remain in balance but once there is imbalance beyond a certain limit, it proves fatal. [1] Here association with saintly persons and spiritual activities are most important to achieve spiritual awareness that enables one to reach the selected destination at the time of death. Religious teachings explain our relationship with God. We should also know that hell is the farthest point from the association and consciousness of God. God-consciousness is very close to heaven. If we are not conscious of God then we are already in the hell. Hindu philosophy lays great stress on meditating upon the world beyond than upon the one in which one lives. The living world, according to the ancient Hindu philosophy, is considered as a transitory camp whereas the actual abode is the world beyond. That is why more stress has been laid on performing death rituals rightly and regularly according to the set procedures.

Sanatan Dharma lays great emphasis on death rituals.[2] Some scholars are of the opinion that a man performs the death rituals of a dead person not for granting any rest or consolation to the deceased but to get rid of the bad and evil effects of such happenings to ones own self. [3] Death is the ultimate reality and can neither be avoided nor altered. It has got a special significance as for the Hindu Dharma is concerned. The rituals and rites attached with the death of a person are based on the tenets laid down in the 'Karma Kanda'. Kashmiri Hindus have been following all these rituals and rites since ancient times. The rituals for the dead extend over a period of one year. However, after that period, the anniversaries are held on year to year basis according to the lunar calendar. The first anniversary is called 'Waharwa'r', a ritual held on the completion of one year. All the rites connected with our manes are known as Shraaddha. However, if we are not in a position to perform Shraaddha on the particular date as per the almanac calculations, due to some un-foreseen and unavoidable reasons, [1] holding of a simple rite is advised, known as 'Manasavun'. Word 'Manasavun' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Manasna' – meaning, 'inclination of the mind to offer anything in the name of the manes to the deserving.' The great propounders of Shaiva philosophy have discussed (Shraaddha) in detail in their writings. Acharya Abhinavagupta has discussed in detail all these rites in *Aloka* No: 25 of his treatise *Tantraloka* under the heading *Shraaddha Deeksha*, - the rules governing, Shraaddha. The *Aloka* includes, among other things, different ways, 'Vidi', needs, 'Prayojanam', and the selected days of the year 'Parva', for observing Shraaddha of the manes. It also discusses the observance of this rite by the kith and kin of the deceased for different castes and classes of the society in different ways and also the gains that the observer or performer of these rites seek known as 'Phalam'. It says that according to the Trika theory of the Agama Shastra, the ritual performances, based on a set procedure and performed by the disciple, etc., of the deceased for obtaining salvation for the soul of the dead, is Shraaddha.[2] While discussing various patterns of the ritual, it clarifies that the last rites of a deceased person can be performed by any of the descendents of the deceased or even by any of his disciples/relatives, etc., without the binding of having been imparted the Holy Thread, considered necessity for performing this Shraaddha which is known as 'Last rites' (Anteshti) and even the other rites that follow it. [1] Acharya Abhinavagupta has clarified in his treatise *Tantraloka* that in order to obtain salvation for the dead, different Shraaddhas extended over a period of one year, excluding the Anniversary, should be performed on the third, tenth and eleventh/twelfth days; every fortnightly (called Pachivara' in Kashmiri for the first three months) and on monthly basis (called Maswara in Kashmiri, after the expiry of three months) for the rest of the year that should include the Shraadha after Six months, called the Shadmos and the Waharva'r - the concluding rite on the expiry of one year. Beyond that period, Shraaddhas on year to year basis are held after a lapse of two years. [2] While concluding the chapter the author says that Shiva, the Saviour of humanity has Himself said these words for the salvation of those dead and for the betterment of all those who perform such rites. [3]

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[1] '*Praanah priyana samaye Kaf, Vaata, Pitta ,*
Kanthah virodhana vidau sumranam kutaste.'
From: *Subashitani.*

[2] Pnaday, Raj Bali, *Hindu Sanakar,* Varanasi. P. 296

[3]. Ibid. P. 298

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[1] In case the birthday in the family coincides with *Shraaddha* of any manes, the performing of the latter rite is not observed. Besides, the holding of any Shraaddha is avoided during *Ashouch* days (both Sootak and Mritak).

[2] *Shraaddha Deekshya : Mritasya shyashyaadi Trika Shaastra vidhaanena Aagamokhtena Shraaddhavidhinaa Mukhti Mukhtiphaladaa ya deekshaa vidheeyate asau Shraaddha deekshiti* I

Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Bishad Kosha, Pt. H., p. 711

According to the *Nilamata Purana*, after the formation of valley of Kashmir, the people attained prosperity while observing the tenets put forth by Nag king Nila for the old Brahman Chandrdeva who had stayed in his palace for a period of six winter months to witness and learn about all the rites, ceremonies and rituals necessary for the people from the plains for their stay in the valley for a full year. He in turn related these directives to Veerodhaya, the chief follower of Kashyapa who returned to the valley that spring after the completion of six month migratory period. As a result of observing these rites and rituals, the people lived peacefully for a period of four eons till the king Gonanda's rule over the valley. But over the years the people had forgotten the old practices, so he asked Brihadashwa one day to narrate the old practices, which Nila earlier had taught to Chandradeva. Thus the *Nilamata Purana* is a repetition of thè conversation that had been held between Nila and the old Brahman Chandradeva earlier. The Purana refers to more than sixty five rituals, rites and ceremonies to be observed by the people desirous of living in the valley of Kashmir without interruption. There is a complete one chapter (number: 52,) named, "*Shraaddha Paksha Varnanam*" and the concluding verse of the said chapter contains the yearning of the deceased forefathers who wish, 'may a boy be born in their family who shall offer milk mixed with honey to them on the specified date of the thirteenth day of the Varsha falling on the Magha constellation?' [1]

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[1] *Anteshti deekshaya deekshitah shasyo adeekhshitopi vaa kashchana*
Shiva shaasanaupdishtena shraaddha visheshena bandhanaan mochite...I
Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihad Kosha, Pt.II, p., 711.

[2] "*Trooyahe turye ahni dashame maasi maasyadhyavatsare I*
Varshe varshe sarva kaalam kaaryastatsvaih sa poorvavat II
Tatra praagvadjed devam Homayeth analetathaa I "
Idid., p.712.

[3] *Evam Shraaddham mukhenaapi bhoga mokshobhayasthitim I*
Kuryath iti Shivenokhtam tatra tatra kripaaluna II
Ibid . p., 712,

While discussing the *Shraaddha Paksha*, in its fifty second canto, the *Nilamata Purana* advocates performance of Shraaddhas on all the days of the fortnight (Ashvin Krishana Paksha) for the veneration of the manes. The devotees have also been advised to devote a full fortnight for the remembrance of the manes soon after the expiry of the Indra Paksha also named as Praushtapada. It is stressed that Shraaddha be performed on all the days of the dark fortnight of Ashwin, except on the fourteenth day which is especially meant for those who have been got killed by means of weapons (i.e. in battles). It is also contains that Keshava (Krishna) himself has advocated the observance of the Shraaddha fortnight. It also indicates that Keshava has confirmed the performance of Shraaddha either in the first one-third part or in the last one-third part of the said fortnight. It has been emphasized that on the thirteenth day of the fortnight, Shraaddha must be performed necessarily. While stating the peculiarities of the rites and rituals to be observed by the people for the whole year during their stay in the valley, Nila, in the concluding two verses of the said canto impresses upon the old Brahman Chandradeva that one must observe the Shraaddha rites of ones manes on the 13th day of the said fortnight even though one may be living either on the bread supplied by others, or is without any wealth or is just a labourer who lives from hand to mouth.[1] At the close of the said canto, Nila narrates the *Pitri Geeta* as had been heard by him from the forefathers of those whose progeny had not performed any Shraaddha for their manes since long.

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[1] *Api nah sa kule jaayet yo no dadhyat trayodasheem /*
Payisaa madhusam mushram varshaasu cha maghaasu cha //
Nilamata Purana 765.

The *Purana,* besides stressing the performance of Shraaddha on different days of the year, also lists different ingredients and edibles that are to be used while performing Shraaddha of the manes. For instance in verses 485-86 of the *Purana* one is advised to perform a Shraaddha making vegetarian offerings on the eighth day of the dark half of the month of Pausha, non-vegetarian offerings have been advocated on the dark eighth day of the month of Magha, and a Shraaddha with offerings consisting of foods and edibles sweetened with sugar on the eighth day of the dark half of the month of Phalguna. On the ninth days of the three months referred to, performing of Shraaddhas of women with the cakes of flour has been advovated.[2]

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[1] *Tatastvanantaram pakshe Shraaddham kaaryam dine dine I*
Chaturdasheem varjiyitva shyamaakaistu visheshatah II
Shastrena nihata ye tu tyebyu dharmya chaturdashi I
Sarvam paksham bhawet Shraaddham evamevaaha Keshawah II
Tribhagaheenam paksham vaa tribhagam antyam eva vaa I
Vitta shaktya tu kartavyam triyodashyam sadaiva hi II
Parapaakaratiyor vai yopi chaivaadhano bhaveth I
Karma jeevi bhaveth yo vai tenaapi Dvija pungava II
Yathaa kathinchid Sharaaddham cha kartayam syath triyodasheem I
Atra gathaa Pitri Geeta nibodha, gadato mama II
NilamataPu.,,v.,760-64.

[2] *Paushakrishnaashtami karyam Shraaddham shaakai dvijottama I*
Maaghakrishnaashtami mamsaih Phaalgunasya sitaashtami II
Apupaih kaaryet Shraaddham nityameva samaaitah I
Navameshu cha taasveva streenaam Shraaddham tu kaaryeth II
Nilamata Puraana, vs. 485-86.

The performance of Shraaddha, besides involving the physical participation of a person, also works as a means of refinement of a person's mental and social behaviour. For instance in one of its verses, the *Purana* has advised that the observer should maintain complete celibacy during the nights preceding the Shraaddhas.'[1]

While discussing the importance of Kurukshetra as a Tirtha of repute, the Nag king Nila says that performance of Shraaddha here is equal to a thousand Horse Sacrifices (Ashva Medha), especially when the Sun is eclipsed or devoured by Rahu.[2]

Brihadashwa, while narrating the sacred places extended over the length and breadth of the valley of Kashmir, as recorded in the *Nilamata Purana* in its last cantos named, "*Vitasta Mahatamya*", impresses upon king Gonanda, the importance of performing a Shraaddha, etc., at Chitrakuta in the following words:

"O! King, funeral ceremonies (Shraaddha), Charity (Dana), reciting the names of God, (Japa), taking the bath (Snaana), Homa (kindling the Sacrificial Fire), and worship (Archana) become everlasting when these are performed at the Chitrakuta Mountain.[3]

The devotees have been advised to give, according to their means, fuel to the Brahmins and grass for their cows on such occasions. It has further been added that by doing so they shall conquer their enemies, attains luster and eternal peace after death. It has been stressed that one should offer sesame mixed water (*Tilodaka)* daily to ones' manes after taking a bath in the morning.[4]:

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[1] *Shraddham kritva prayatnena brahamchaari vaseth nisham* I
Nilamata Puraana,v...487 (a).

[2] *Shraaddham, ya kurute tatra Rahugraste Devaakare I*
Ashwa Medha sahasrasya phalam praaphnoti anuttamam II
Ibid, v., 133.

[3] *Shraaddham, daanam japyam, snaanam, homam tathaarchanam I*
Sarvam akshyatam yati yat kritam tatra Paarthiva II
Ibid. v., 1314.

[4] *Brahmneshu cha daatavaym indhanam shktistathaa I*
Trinam dadyat gavaamarthe yathaa shaktya dvijatishu II
Evam yah kurute samyakh sa ripoon adhitishthiti I
Kaayagni deepti saubhaagyam labeth cha uttamam gatim II
Tasyam uposhitah snaatah tilair datvaa tilodakam II
Nilamata Pu., vv. 497-99 (b).

The word Shraaddha means an act of devotion that the people have for their manes. Thus, the offerings that people make in honour of their fore-fathers in the form of water, food, clothing and money etc., and offer it to the Brahmins with utmost devotion, is described as Shraaddha in our scriptures. It is derived from the root-word "Shraddhaa," meaning faith, trust, reliance, belief, etc. One of our most venerated saints, Shri Pushpadant who is the author of one of the famous Statotra, (Mahimnapar Stotra) – and who has composed a devotional song in praise of Lord Shiva, while expressing his extreme devotion for the Lord of the universe, has beautifully elucidated the scope of the word Shraddha in 21st verse of the said song saying, "Daksha Prajapati, the son of Brahma and the father of Uma/Sati, was a good administrator and he did all his jobs beautifully and faithfully. All the Rishis and hoards of gods would always sing in his praise though they knew that his bull like temper would not bear any good fruits because all he missed was Shraddhaa,-devotion and faith." The Rishi concludes the couplet with the advice that, "It is better to have faith (Shraddhaa) than Vidhi (Knowledge), to avoid any future misfortunes."[1]

Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihat Kosha defines Shraddhaa in these words, "Where there is no query, 'What and for whom', that which is given out of complete trust and unparalleled faith is, Shraddhaa".[2]

Discussing various aspects of Shraaddhaa, Acharya Abhinavagupta, has further elucidated in *Tantraloka* that 'The progeny of a dead person might have completed all the rituals like Uddah, Anteshti and other Shraaddhas of the dead from time to time but still feeding to those who are thirsty and hungry is the most necessary act on all such occasions.[1]

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[1] *Kriya Daksho dakshah kritu patir adhishas tana britaam,*
Risheenaam Aartejyam sharanada sadasyah Suruganaah I
Kritu brimshas tvattah krituphala vidhaana vyasanino,
Dhruvan kartuh Shraddhaa vidhram abhichaaraya hi makhah II
Shivapuja,(Mahimaastotra),edited by *Jyotirvid,Pt.Keshava Bhatta,* Bombay Press, 1925, p.14, v. 21.

[2] .*Yaya vinaa na kaṣyapi kopyarthah na siddhayati kvochit I*
Saa nnishchayatmikaa dridhaa matih Shraddhaa I. Yatha:
Yayaa vinaa na kasyapi kopyrthah siddhayati kochit I
Tat pratipaaditearthe ya nishchayatma dridhaa matih I
Saa Shraddhaa nishchayatma anyan nignantee hanti samshayam. II
Rameshwar Jha, *Purnata Pratibhijya* Varanasi, v.298-99,
Also, *Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihat Kosha*, p.711.

The veneration of the deceased is based mostly on the *Yajurveda Samhita, Markandeya Purana*, the *Dharama Sindhu,* and the *Yajnyavalkys Smriti*, etc. In *Markandeya Purana* there is a narration in which Ruchi, a devotee, wanted to know from his ancestors, who were then in the heaven, "How to address a number of our respected Devas, Rishis and different manes that came under the category of forefathers, while venerating them individually at the time of performing their Shraaddha." Disturbed by this thought, as he desired to get an answer to his query, the manes (Pitar) told him from heaven that the Devas, the Rishis and the guests (manes), all were worthy of veneration involving performance of a Shraaddha on the specified Tithis of their death. It was further impressed upon him that the Devas, Rishis and Pitras should be addressed with the words; Namah" while making offerings to the Devas, the Rishis should be approached with the word, "Swaha" and the manes (Pitar) should be approached with the word, "Svadhah" while making offerings to them on their Shraaddha. [2]

The ancestors of Ruchi, who were in heaven, tell him "It is true that a person who venerates his manes with love and devotion and offers them things, like food-grains and best eatables of their choice, found on this earth, on their anniversaries, his/her fortune attains unlimited heights and all his misfortunes vanish. [1]

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[1] *Anteshtimritoddharna Shraaddha deekshaanaam antyamenaapi yadhyapi kritaarthataa I*
Tathaapi bubhukshoh kriyabhuyastvam phalabhuyastvaayeti sarvamaacharet II

Acharya Abhinavagupta *Tantraaloka*, 25,9.
Also: *Kashmir Shaiva Darshan Brihat Kosha*, p.712.

[2] *Pitar aochuh,*
Grihi samast Devaanaam pitrinaam ch tathaarhanam,
Rishinaam cha atithinaam cha kurvanlokaanupaashnute,
Swahocharnanto Devaan svadhochaarantah Pitrin I
Karma Kanday Pt. II. Edited by, *Pandit Keshav Bhat*, Bombay, 1933, P.. [illegible]

One cannot forget the sweet memories of one's close ancestors who looked after their progeny till yester years and who felt satisfied and elated on seeing them prosperous and felt moved in their sorrow. While emphasizing in clear words the importance of performing, Shraaddha our age old Dharama Shastra, lays stress on celebrating and observing a fast on the anniversaries of the manes with devotion. It also confirms giving alms to the deserving according to ones economic status. It lays down a set procedure that a devotee has been advised to adopt on such occasions. *Dharama Sindhu*, a treatise on Karma Kanda, contains, "What ever is offered with reverence/ devotion comes under the name of Shraaddha".[2]

It is further elucidated in the above mentioned book that: "the dark fifteenth day (Amavasya) of every month, the whole dark fortnight of the month of Ashwin (Ashwin Krishna Paksha) including Amavasya, Summer and Winter Solstices (Uttarayana and Dakshnayana), the two Sankarantis when the Sun enters Aries (Mesha) and Libra (Tula) called Vishuddha Sankarantis, Makar Sankraanti (when the Sun enters Capricorn), Vyatipata (in Astrology the Seventh Astronomical Yuga), the Sun and the Moon eclipses and the anniversaries of the manes are the occasions when one should find a qualified Brahmin, and perform the Shraaddha of his/her forefathers, who are in heaven.

Yojarveda Samhita, which is considered as the most ancient and authentic treatise on all the ritualistic practices, categorically says that after venerating and inviting gods through all the processes of Avahana, etc., it is the occasion for making offerings to different gods/manes in the Holy Fire. Thus approaches the devotee to the Holy Fire, "Oh! Fire god, we are desirous to venerate you and as such ignite you. You please be seated here at your selected place to enable us to perform the Yajnya, for making offerings to you. We kindle you and we are desirous to offer you your cherished offerings to satisfy you. We also request you to invite our forefathers from heaven to relish the offerings meant for them that we are going to offer to them through you".[1]

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[1] *Tanmayatvena vaanchhadbhir vriddhimaatyantikeem paraam,* I
Shraaddheshu shraddhaya abhishta lokatraya pradaayinah, I
Namasyeham pitrinmartair archayante bhuvi ye sadaa, I
Dhaanyri shudairvataahaaraih taponirdhutakalmashaih II
Karma Kanday Pt. II, Edited by, *Pandit Keshav Bhat*, Bombay, 1933,
P.,, 125 .

[2] *Shraddhaya diyati yatra tat Shraaddham prakirtitam* I
Dharma Sindhu.

The Vedic *Richa* further impresses upon us to approach forefathers while performing the Shraaddha, thus, "Oh our forefathers, you are worthy of tasting what we present to you like the Soma offered to gods who also take their share of Yajnya through Agni. Please come to this place while gliding through the air on the paths adopted by gods for this purpose and take the cherished share from this Yajnya when we recite the word "Svadhah". Thus contented you may wish for our mental peace and prosperity.[2]

After completing the Kalasha Poojanam, the devotee starts kindling the ceremonial Fire, known as Agni Sadhanam. The Deva and the Pitri Homa is completed using dry fruits like, (coconuts, dates, apricots, and sugar candy), barley, honey, flowers and purified butter, etc. The mixture is offered to Agni while chanting from a number of scriptures. The 'Yava-Tila Homa'- offering barley and sesame seeds, is followed by *'Anna Homa* – offering cooked rice to Agni and lastly pieces of bread are offered to Agni, and oblations are made to gods, Rishis, manes and Vishvadevas (Demigods). It is a special class of deities and demi gods entitled to the offerings and here the Homa portion of the Shraaddha comes to an end and the Pitri Shraaddha begins. The devotee presumes that the manes, in whose honour the anniversary is being performed, personally come to cherish the food offered to him/her on the occasion.

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[1] *.Om, Ushantastvaa havaahamaha ushantah samidheemahi* I
Ushantanushanta aavaha pitrinhavishe aattave II
*Yajurveda Samhita, Richa*o: 19/70, Also *Karama Kaanday*, Pt.II., p.37.

[2] *Ayantu nah pitarah somyaso agnishvattah pathibhih devayanaih I*
Asmin yajne svadhaya madanto adhibruvantu te avantvasman II
Yajurveda Samhita, Richa,: 18/58.

While performing the Pitri Kriya, the Kula Guru and the devotee change their seats. Now the sitting places are made north –south. The devotee has to sit facing south whereas the Guru who directs all this Kriya sits facing north. The place between the two is cleanly besmeared with clay and water and the Guru marks out an eating place in rectangular shape with the help of rice floor for placing of two Thalis, the one part is marked out with a three-lined strip which is meant for seating the deceased and the other part with a single lined strip is meant for the deity. [1] The recitations start and the devotee is made to feel that the manes, the deity, etc., whom he is worshipping, are present before him/her and for this purpose two knots made of Darbha straws, called "Vishthura" are placed at the besmeared places, one out of the two, made from three straws of Darbha, is placed at the south-west corner of the Pitri Thali and the other, made from a single straw of Darbha, is placed at the centre to the east of the deity's Thali. The Upayam [2] (made out of seven straws of Kusha with a single knot at the top), is kept over the helix of the left ear by the devotee. The process of Shraaddha starts after completing all these formalities. The Yajnyopavita is kept round the neck going under the left arm in case of making offerings to the manes and going round under the right arm at the time of making offerings to the deity. Avahana and Asana are made by placing two straws of Kusha, at both the places one marked out for the Pitra and the other for the deity. But one thing is strictly observed that the veneration of the Pitra is done in the Apasaveena mode and that of the deity and the Achamana of the self is done with the Saveena mode of the Yajnyopavita. The devotee has been directed to rinse his/her mouth with fresh water six times during the performance of this portion of the Shraaddha. The first rinsing of the mouth is done at the beginning of the Shraaddha and the sixth one is completed when the Shraaddha ends. The second, third, fourth and the fifth are done after the completion of Padhyam, Tilakam, Virarjanam or Vikirana and Pinda danam, respectively. [1]

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[1] .In case of a *Mritak* a single lined rectangle is laid and a single straw of Darbha is made use of till the Anniversary of the dead is held.

[2] It is a combination of two words, Upa (close) Ayam (length). All the distances between the devotee, the manes and the deity end when the worshiper makes its use when he/she is performing the Shraaddha of his/ her manes.

The following measures are initiated for venerating the both (the Pitir and the deity) as per the directions contained in the Pooja Paddati already discussed:

1. Asanam: flower petals or two straws of Darbha, one for the manes (Pitra,) and the other for the deity, are meant as Asana, the sitting places for both at the two selected places;
2. Avahanam : inviting the dead/deity to make his/her formal presence at the selected place ,
3. Padhyam: formally washing the feet of the dead /deity with fresh water that includes herbs and puffed rice, etc.
4. Argyam: formally washing the face of the dead/ deity with fresh water that includes milk, curd, ghee, Darbha, puffed rice grains, flowers and barley grains, etc.,
5. Gandham: offering the Tilakam (sandalwood or saffron) and (after washing the finger) offering flowers and puffed rice particles as Argam/Pushpam,
6. Naivedyam: offering eatables, like cocked rice and vegetables, etc., and
7. Aachamanam, rinsing of the mouth by the manes/deity after taking the Naivedyam and after concluding eating.

The Richa from the *Markandeya Purana* as quoted in the book Karma Kandi, (all parts, an authoritative book on our Karma Kanda), reads that at the time of holding Shraaddha one should adore the Gaya tirtha and remember the Mace Bearer, "Vishnu" before proceeding further in the performance of Shraaddha. After paying ones salutations to the said tirtha and the deity one should keep in mind ones forefathers and then only one should start the performance of the Shraaddha.[1]

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[1] *Shraaddhaarambhe tathaa chaante paadya gandhe tathaivacha I*
Vikire pinda daane cha shatsutva Aachmanam smritam II
Karma Kanday Pt. II, Edited by Jyotirvid, Pandit Keshav Bhart, Bombay, 1933, p. 26.

After sanctifying the food cooked for the Shraaddha, the first offering is made to the Holy Fire in the name of those of our manes whom we consider existing in the world, in the atmosphere, beneath the layers of water, or in heavens. All of them are asked to cherish this nectar-like food offered to them through the Homa and thus they feel completely satisfied. We also place the share of food meant for the manes in whose name the anniversary is observed, in the plate kept on the besmeared place, the devotee says, "The Pitar may cherish this portion of nectar-like food offered to him/her in this container" on the date of his/her anniversory.[2]

This is followed by the Pinda Dana as detailed in the scriptures. A ball made of cooked rice is offered to each of the manes, (father/mother, grand father/mother, great grand father/mother) whose Shraaddha is held, and the three balls made from cocked rice are kept on a well-besmeared place near the Holy Fire. The place is also decorated with Kusha and flowers prior to placing the said balls of cooked rice on it. Last of all the fourth ball of rice is placed in the name of 'Moola Pursha', the first ancestor from whom the Gotra of the devotee began at the initial stage. It is placed at the central place in front of the already placed three balls. The rice balls are sanctified with Tilakam, and flowers. [3] Here the Vasah (clothing,) rice and other eatables are offered to the manes according to the choice of the devotee. The Shraaddha concludes with the benedictions to the effect that, 'Let the ancestors who are now in Heaven bestow on their progeny presently living on this earth, longevity, wealth, knowledge, (Vidhya), and eternal peace of mind before their due date of attaining the final salvation.' These are the blessings, which the manes bestow on their generations that are presently living in this world and who get all these blessings as contained in the scriptures that also include the description of these ritualistic formalities of the Shraaddha in honour of our manes on the scheduled dates of the year. The practice of performing such rites is a continuation of the pre-Vedic culture and is practiced in the whole sub-continent even now. The Vedic Richa in the *Yajurveda Samhita* mentions all good wishes and prosperity for all those who perform such rites while remembering their manes on their death anniversaries. [1]

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[1] *.Shraaddhakaale Gayam dhyatvaa dhyatvaa Devam Gadaadharam I*
Svaanpitrinmansaa dhyatvaa pashchaat Shraaddham samaarabhet II
Karma Kanday Pt. II, Edited by *Jyotirvid*, Pandit Keshav Bhart, Bombay, 1933, p. 27.

[2] *Iti agnau hatva,. Ye maamakaah pitrah paarthivaaso yeantarikshe ye divi ye samudre, I*
Ye vaachamaaphtva amrita babhuvaste asmin yajnye sarva kaamaan labhantaam II
Etatdvah pitaro bhaadheyam paatreshu dattam Amritam svadhaavat. II
Ibid., p.33.

[3] All this process is done with the 'Apasveena' posture, whereas the Tilkam is applied to the rice balls with the thumb, keeping the hand upside down.

Here the Shraaddha comes to an end with the recitation of a couplet from the *Markandeya Purana* (also contained in the *Karama Kandi* Pt. II), the devotees and their family members, are offered a walnut each as Naived and a splash of water from the Kalsha. The couplet contains the good wishes for all those attending the function and further says, "For the purpose of attaining Heaven (Svarga), the great Muni, Markandaya has illuminated this path. It prays for good health, fortune and longevity –for all those present on the occasion and a life span of one hundred autumns for all." [2] Here the Shraaddha ends with the Visarjana or Vikirna (departure) of all the deities and manes including Agni, Kalasha Devatas .and the Kshetrapals.

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[1] *Aayuh prajaam dhanam vidhyam svargamokshau sukhaani cha I*
Prayachantu tathaa raajyam nrinaam pretaah pitaamahaah I
Esha pindo maya dattastava haste Janaardhana I
Gayayam pitra rupena svayam eva upagrihitaam I
Aatamanahscha artha laabhaaya kshemaaya vijayaya cha I
Karma Kanday Pt. II, by Pandit Keshav Bhart, Bombay, 1933, p. 47.

[2] *Maarkaandeya Muninah svargavaidhyayoh svara pater yatha I*
Aayur Aarogyamaishvariyam etattat tritayamastu te I
Jeeva tvam sharadah shatam II
Ibid, p.53.

However, it may be pointed out that there are a number of other performances (Shraaddhas) associated with the death rites of the departed. [1]

Like most of the Sarswat Brahmin clans of India, Kashmiri Hindus believe in performing the twenty-four Sanskars that cover human life from pre-natal existence till death - the last journey as per the Holy Scriptures. Maharshi Vyasa in his famous epic, the Mahabharata advocates only sixteen Sanskars for the Kshetriyas and other ruling classes/clans without any contradiction with the ideas put forth by other Rishis in this behalf which include the treaties like the *Agni Purana*, the *Griha Sutras*, the *Yajnvavalkya Smriti*, the *Manu Smriti*, the *Ashvalayana, Paaraskara* and *Vaikhans Griha Sutras, Veda Kalpadrum,* and the *Kashmir Karma Kanda*, etc., all laying emphasis on Chaturvimshat, Shodasha and Ekadasha (twenty-four, sixteen, and eleven) Sanskars except Gautama the propounder of the Nyaya philosophy who advocated forty Sanskaras. All these treaties are based on the ideas put forth by *Laugakshi Grahi Sutra*, at the initial stage mostly all these have been accepted by all, though with slight modifications that suited the local conditions. Probably, that resulted in the variation in the number of Sanskars including those upheld by the Kashmiri Pandits till date.

Our scriptures have generally given a life span of one hundred years to an individual- "*Jeeva Sharada Shatam*", a blessing that is contained in the *Yajurveda* and it is repeated by the Kula Guru while concluding the ritual of the Shraaddha ceremony as well.

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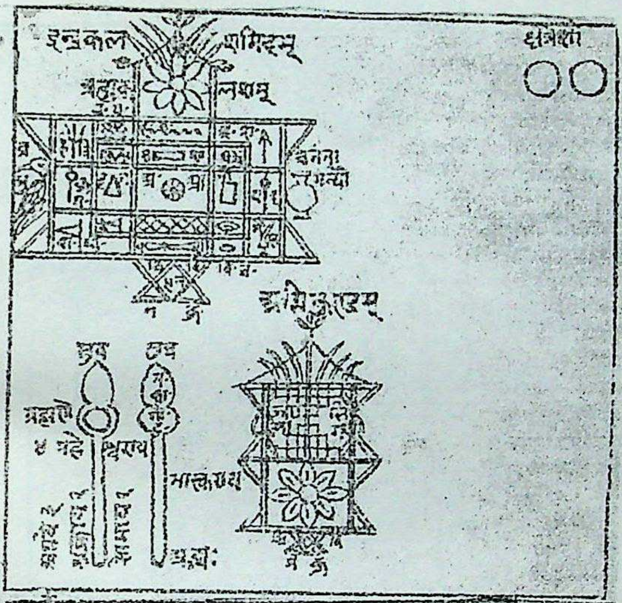
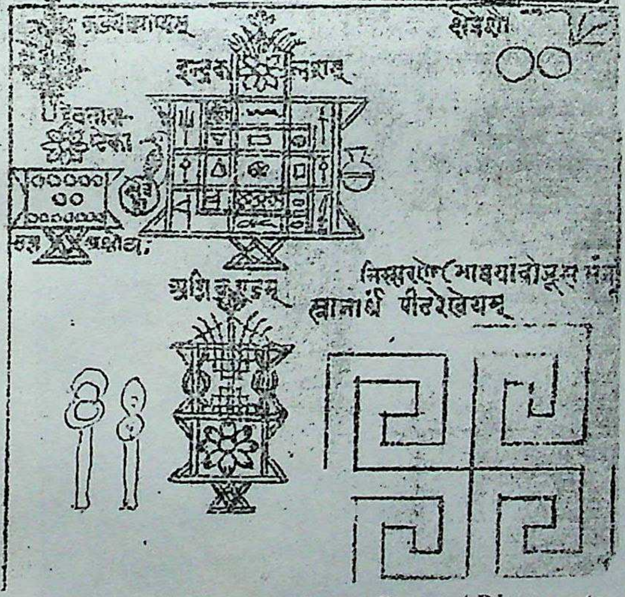
[1] S. N. Pandit, *Kashmir Hindu Sanskars (Rituals, Rites and Customs)*, year, 2006, pp. 277-312.

Adenda - I

(A) Indra Kalshas

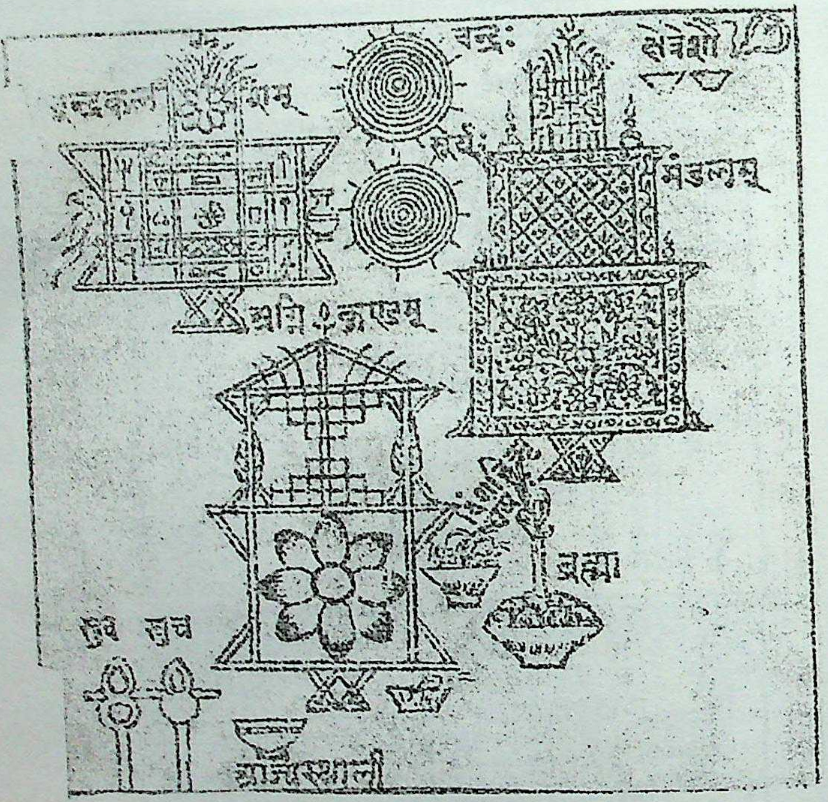
Kalasha For Deva /Rishi Kriya





Kalsha For all Homes, Kanya Daana/ Divgon,etc.

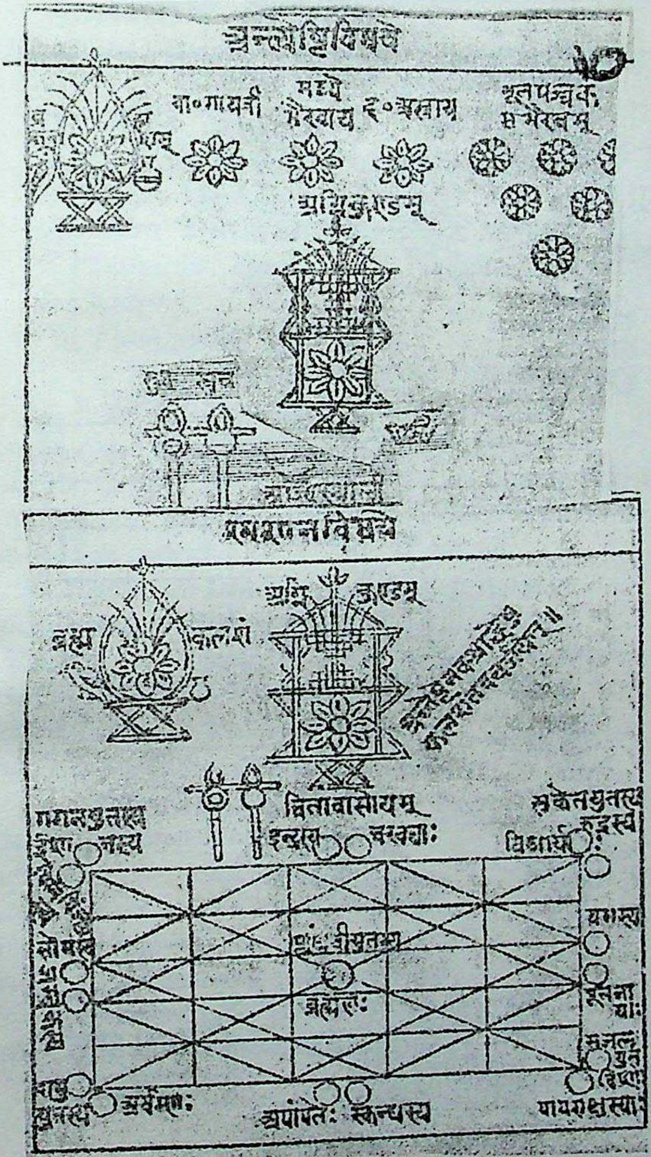
Kalasha for Yagnyopavita


चन्द्रः
सूर्यः
मंडलम्
अग्निकुण्डम्
ब्रह्मा
स्रुव
स्रुच
आज्यस्थाली

Adenda - II

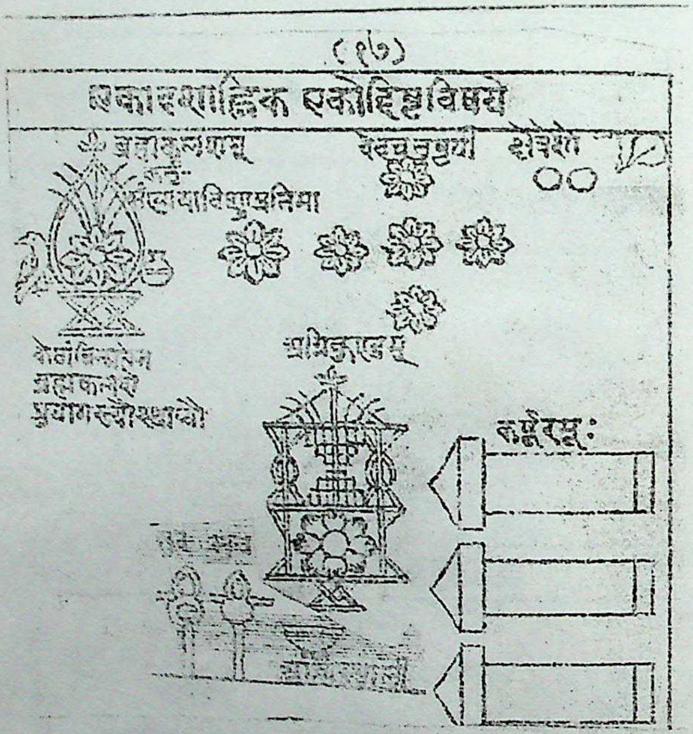
(B) Brahama/ Pitri Kalasha

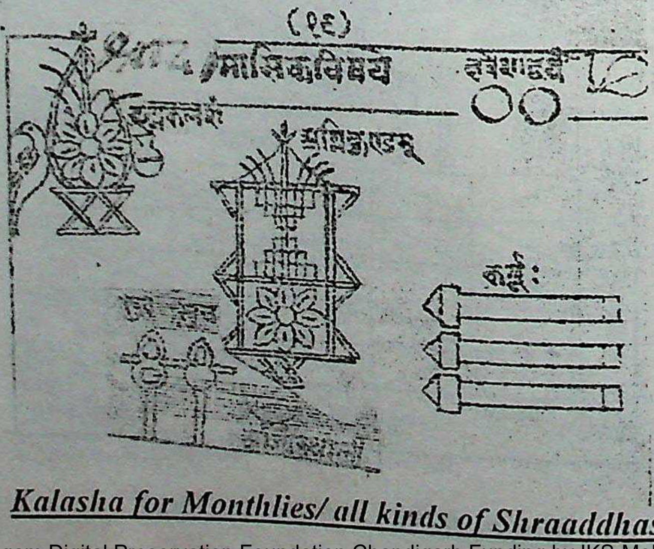
Kalasha for Anteshti(Last Rites)


अग्निकुण्डम्
ब्रह्म
चितावासोयम्
इन्द्रस्य
यमस्य
सोमस्य
ब्रह्मणः
अर्यम्णः
अपांपतेः स्कन्धस्य

Klasha at the Cremation ground

Kalsha for the Eleventh Day Shraaddha


(१८)
एकादशाहिक एकोद्दिष्टविषये
ब्रह्मकलशम्
शालग्रामविष्णुप्रतिमा
अग्निकुण्डम्
कर्षूत्रयः


(१९)
मासिकविषये
ब्रह्मकलशं
अग्निकुण्डम्
कर्षूः

Kalasha for Monthlies/ all kinds of Shraaddhas

Addenda - III
Almansic Details
(according to the Safta Rishi Samvat Prevalent in Kashmir)

Note : i. The names of the months of the year:
1. *Vaishak* 2.*Jyashta*.3.*Ashaada* 4. *Shravana*.
5. *Bhadra* 6.*Ashwin*.7.*Kartika*. 8. *Margha*.
9. *Pousha*. 10. *Magha*. 11. *Phalguna*.
12. *Chaitra*

ii. *Fortnightlies cf the month*:
1. For Bright fortnight (*Shokala Pakshasy*)
2. For. Dark Fortnight (*Krishna Pakshasy*)

iii. *Days of a fortnight*, (*Tithis* can either be p. *'Poor'* or *d. 'Deva'* in the case of *'d'* we name the current *tithi* with the word, *parata'* with the next days *tithi*).The total number of tithes is 15 as under:-

1. *Pratipadhyam* 2. *Dviteeyasyam* 3. *Triteeyasyam*
4. *Chaturthyam*. 5. *Panchamyam*. 6. *Shyashthyam*.
7. *Saftamyam* 8. *Ashtamyam* 9. *Navamyam* 10. *Dashmyam*
11. *Aekadashyam* 12. *Dvashyam*. 13. *Triyodashyam*.
14 *Chaturdshyam*. 15 *Pooranamasyam* or *Poornapanchadashyam /Amavasyam*.

iv. Name of days of the week:
1. Sunday (*Ravivasaranitayam*).
2. Monday (*Somavasaranitayam*).
3. Tuesday, (*Mangalvasaranitayam*).
4. Wednesday (*Buddhavasranitayam*).
5. Thursday (*Guruvasaranitayam*)
6. Friday, (*Shakur/Bharga-vasaranitayam*),
7. Saturday, (*Shanivasaranitayam*).

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6	21	*Bhawah*	*Bhuwah*
21	7	*Pishachas*	*Pishachas.*
38	14	in detail	in detail in
40	29	as holy the	as holy as the
41	5	*Gharuda*	*Garuda*
46	21	of the *Ashoka*	of *Ashoka*
52	27	old dwar Brahman	old dwarf Brahman
56	28	the this month	this month
66	17	with *Divari* stone	with *Devri* stone
73	29	*Shasiva*	*Shiva*
93	2	he new could	he could
	8-9	Here has quoted	Here he has quoted
99	7	*Bhawah*	*Bhuwah*
103	12	society As a whole	society as a whole.1
104	26-27	based on either on the Solar or on theLunar	based either on the or on the Lunar
127	18	retreat	retreats
133	36	Tough	Though
138	13	valley t, and	valley, and
140	11	from this land.	from this land.”
158	14	to the and *Yaksha*	to the *Yaksha.* 1
166	23	observance attention	observance and attention
168	3	matrimonial matter	matrimonial matters
174	27	such occasions:	such occasion.:
181	17	and the sky for	and the sky, for
190	20	fact that that imparting	fact that imparting
192	31	heavenly beings and	heavenly bodies and
200	28	of the Punjab.	of Punjab.
242	36	Governor this State	Governor of this State
243	38	*Diwnship*	*Diwanship*
253	30-31	who a renowned	who was a renowned
256	4	*Trisal* and other	*Trisal* and others,

Page	Line	Incorrect	Correct
257	1	and they knowledge	and they knew
288	31	*saavadaanaa that*	*saavadaanaa tath*
294	32/33	*Biksha Yarta*	*Biksha Yatra*
312	31/32	shouted at him from	shouted from
331	30/31	such an ailments	such ailments
336	14	towards *Bhagwa Ji*	towards *Bhagwan*
337	30	1951.	1950.
358	36	*Tarachand Nahru*	*Tarachand Nehru*
372	37	by performing a.	by reciting a
	38	It is also involves	It also involves
392	19	celebration.	Celebrations,
412	28	It is also contains	It also contains
414	23	attains luster	attain luster
420	3	*Virarjanam*	*Visarjanlatam*

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1. *Ropa Bhawani:Akh Saam*, Published by the University of Kashmir, year 1983,
2. *Ka'shiren Battan Ha'ndi' Rasa'm Ta' Rewaaj*. Published by the University of Kashmir, year 1983,
3. *Kashmir Hindu Sanskars (Rituals, Rites and Customs*) A Study. Year, 2006, Sponsored by Indian Council of Historical Research, Govt., of India, New Delhi.

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